"The Eccentrics"

Careful what you Love...

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Darkness. The audience hears the simple melody of the love theme, “Knowing is All” on ukulele, joined by accordion, and violin, then an odd, otherworldly, metallic voice is heard, progressively lower in pitch and deeper as it counts down the numbers, "Three, two, one...", a gentle rumble like thunder, builds under the last phrase of the melody, and suddenly a deep, resonant, explosive, echoing sound, a flash of light, a spot on what looks to be a flame on stage. A woman screams in a strange, compressed transistor tone, almost surreal, "No, my Love!" Then a white mechanical dove appears, fluttering above the flames, ascending until it disappears ~

A rich baritone voice brings the audience into our story:

NARRATOR
We are awakened, inspired, shaped and fashioned by what we love in this world. Careful what you love...

FADE IN:

“THE FONT”, THE EXOTIC, DECADENT, DIVE BAR/STRIP CLUB, A CHESS BOARD WITH PIECES, ON THE BAR, STAGE LEFT, CHECKERS BOARD ON THE OTHER SIDE. AN ORNATE GOLDEN CAGE CONTAINING A SILVER, MECHANICAL DOVE, IS SUSPENDED OVER THE BAR AND A LARGE EXPOSED-GEARS CLOCK HANGS HIGH ABOVE. THROUGH THE OPPOSING MOVEMENTS OF THE HANDS OF THIS CLOCK (EVEN TIME MOVES IN ECCENTRIC WAYS IN THIS WORLD)THE PASSAGE OF TIME IS SHOWN. THERE IS A LARGE SCREEN ON EITHER SIDE OF THE CLOCK, AND A BEAUTIFUL SCENE OF SUNRISE IS DEPICTED IN PANORAMA ACROSS THE SCREENS. "NIGHT" PERSONIFIED, IN A BLACK TOP HAT AND TAILS, LEANS ON THE LEFT SIDE OF THE BAR, LOOKING TO THE RIGHT EXPECTANTLY...

NARRATOR
The instant inspiration is born, the break of dawn when the dark of Night quiets her questions of dreams and doubts, and waits patiently to meet the first bold beams of the brilliant Day rushing in joyfully, to share illumination and levity, reason and revelation!

"DAY", personified, in a pristine white suit and ebony cane, rushes in happily, makes a joyous gesture with his arms raised, smiles at the audience, then at NIGHT at the other end of the bar. They look at each other. DAY greets NIGHT with a bow. Scenes of dawn breaking fill the two screens above the bar.

DAY and NIGHT begin the duet,"GOOD TOGETHER".

DAY takes over as NIGHT bids farewell. RED enters the bar, stage right, cleans a bit, welcomes the 3 burlesque dancers, COCO (black girl with an afro), SUNNY (buxom blonde) and SUAVE (handsome Latino man). They pantomime this all, including some playful teasing, swinging on the stripper pole and flamboyantly playing a game of chess, each taking turns so all are involved.

DAY and NIGHT finish the second verse of "Good Together, leaning back to back, looking over their shoulders at each other fondly.

The scene at the bar goes dark as the two screens above flicker and sizzle out, then snow screen back up to show in bleak sepia-toned black and white, LANCE at his place of work, a stark factory office warehouse in a dream-like style, pointing and instructing other workers all with plain masks instead of faces, all seated in rows typing on keypads and looking at screens in space in front of them. They move their shoulders, laugh and pat LANCE on the back, merrily.

Iris out on the screens above. Spot on the exposed-geared clock, above the bar. The hands of clock spin quickly in opposing direction to show night will be falling shortly.
Soft spot on NIGHT, stage right, who joins DAY on stage once more. They share a quiet spotlight as they sing the last verse of "GOOD TOGETHER" before she bids DAY farewell as night falls and the bar is now open for business.

RED & THE CROW*

AT THE RIGHT END OF THE BAR, SITS THE CROW, DRESSED ALL IN BLACK WITH A LEATHER AVIATOR CAP AND GOGGLES RESTING ON TOP OF HIS HEAD. AT THE OTHER END IS LULU, INCOGNITO, WEARING A RIDICULOUSLY LARGE HAT, TRENCH COAT OVER A RED DRESS, AND SUNGLASSES SO DARK THAT SHE CAN BARELY SEE HER MARTINI GLASS ON THE BAR.

The band softly plays the saucy rhythms of the tango, "Intoxicated". LULU Grasps the delicate stem of her martini glass after numerous tries and only after slipping her shades down a bit. She victoriously seizes upon it, attempting to appear chic and demure taking a sip. RED checks in on THE CROW who she knows as "MISTER EKSHUN". He makes a move on the checkers board to his right and gives a hearty laugh.

RED
What'll you have, Mister Ekshun?

RED walks over to THE CROW, sees he still has more thick red liquid in his glass.

RED
OH, I see you still have some life left in this one...If you WANT it.

She looks at the checkers board to see he has won and smiles.

RED
Ah, you got me again, huh?

THE CROW
Ah hah! Seems I've won this little game of ours, Miss RED!

He leaps off his barstool dramatically, turns to face the audience, rips open his black shirt (snaps?)exposing his grotesque mechanical heart, cogs and hinges moving, sputtering. A glint of spark escapes its innards. An audible gasp is heard, but LULU at the other end of the bar is too busy trying to drink her martini successfully to even notice. RED seems unimpressed and rolls her eyes a little. (She does not see his flamboyant display to the audience.) She picks up his glass, with what seems to be a Bloody Mary and sees it's still half full.

RED
Mister E? You want this?

THE CROW
Do I want this, the lovely lady asks...Do I want? Well we all want now don't we, Miss RED? We all want SOMEthing.
(Quieter, leans in to RED)
I wanted a daughter once. I wanted

to raise that daughter with the
love of my life once. I wanted to
be proud of her, to teach her
everything I know. That didn't
happen though, DID it, Miss RED!

Despite his crazed crescendo-ing and menacing tone, RED remains completely unfazed and actually sympathetic, while the dancers move away from him in fear.

THE CROW
Well, that was 28 years ago, and
I'm sure she's doing fine where
ever she is...After all, the
all-powerful, all-loving
Motherboard knows exactly who's DNA
should be ideally paired with
whose. And the all-powerful,
all-loving Children's Facilities
knows exactly how to raise our good
little citizens. We all know that,
don't we now, Miss RED?

He almost growls to himself to calm his nerves, then pulls from his pocket a shiny yo-yo and does a few tricks. The dancers love this and gather around to oo and ah. Then he pockets it and turns abruptly back to RED, again relaxed, confident and a bit mischievous.

THE CROW
I want to know what you call this
delightful drink, RED. That's what
I want.

RED
How about "The Bloody Crow"? They
say crows travel together in a
"murder"...Kinda catchy, don't you
think?

He drinks the last of it and ceremoniously flourishes a red hanky out of his pocket, whisks it neatly around the rim of the glass and sets it down on the bar.

THE CROW
A bit macabre, I think. How about
the "Bloody RED"?

RED

Why, Mister Ekshun! You'll have to stop, or people will talk...

THE CROW
(Turns quickly to the audience conspiratorially)
Yesss...People do TALK!

THE CROW
(Back to RED at the bar)
Ah, but you're much too modest, Miss RED!

RED
Maybe we could name the new drink after the lovely dove you made for me, Mister E...

RED turns to the beautiful gilded cage and gestures to the silver dove inside that flutters his wings and lets out a tiny spark from his beak.

Lights dim to blackout at the bar as the double screens above light up with a daytime sepia toned scene of a soft-focused, dreamy RED and CROW leaning in flirtatiously toward each other smiling.

Below the screens, a gentle spot comes up again to show DAY lying casually across the bar, between THE CROW and RED, who can barely be seen in the shadows and are frozen still, like everyone else at the bar in mid-action.

DAY sings the first two verses of "Good Together" sweetly with the band as the scene unfolds: "We're good together. I just want to be around you. We're good together. I'm so glad I finally found you. When we're together, the whole world seems to disappear. When we're together, I just want to hold you near..."

Simultaneously on Screens above: THE CROW pulls out from behind his back a small box with a loosely tied bow on top. RED takes it happily and opens it to see a mechanical bird inside, takes it out, cradles it in her hands, presses it to her face and gives a start as it slowly spreads it's wings a bit. THE CROW excitedly bids her to wait a moment, as the bird perches himself on her finger. The Crow quickly returns carrying in his arms a spectacular gilded cage in which to house the pet. RED delicately places the bird inside and

turns to embrace THE CROW enthusiastically. As she does, he seems content, then winces and extracts himself, a bit awkwardly. She doesn't seem to notice, smiling at her new pet in the cage. The images flicker and fade out on the screens. DAY ends his verse singing as the lights dim on him and the band seamlessly moves from the brightness of the swing song in C major to the darkness of slow bossa rhythm in A minor.

NIGHT, with a soft spot on her appearing stage left, finishes from the bridge to the last verse of "The Mystery of You" with the band:"So don't explain, don't reveal those secret thoughts, you conceal. Just leave me this all that you seem, one secret kiss to haunt my dreams. The mystery of you, so dark, so deep you hide. The mystery of you, the distant soul inside. The mystery of you, the one they can't explain. And when our love is through, mystery will remain." Spot out on her.

The lights at the bar on THE CROW and RED come up again. Everyone else is in motion again, talking silently while the conversation between RED and THE CROW is heard by us.

THE CROW
Perhaps "The Bloody Crow"is best...

RED
Mister Ekshun...
(Leaning in a bit, warmly)
You know, we could spend more time together. We could be...Closer...

THE CROW relaxes, then gives a start as he sees RED nearly swooning toward him, and he pulls away, with some effort.

THE CROW
I know, RED...And you know I might like that...But you see RED, I'm afraid I don't have the heart for a woman like you!

RED
Why of course you do!

THE CROW
Don't be so sure..!

RED
Whatever do you mean?

THE CROW
I'm not like other men, my Queen...

RED
And that is what I love about you!

THE CROW
Careful there...You, uh, I don't want to get hurt, Miss RED.

RED
But don't you know, Mister Ekshun..?

THE CROW
Ah, there's so much we don't know, Miss RED!

RED
You and your mysteries, Mister Ekshun!

THE CROW
You DO know me!

He is overtaken with her momentarily and leans in close to her, their faces almost touching, almost in a kiss, as the a violin sweetly plays the opening melody of "The Mystery of You",joined by an accordion for just a measure. THE CROW stops himself, as the music stops. Then he slowly pulls back again. The hands on the clock spin wildly, accompanied by the band in mad tuning up flurries. Both stop abruptly.

THE CROW
Ah, the hour approaches! I must leave you. Duty calls!

RED
Back to your sanitation of the streets, my elusive love?

THE CROW
Ah, yes, my humble profession, garbage collecting...
(turns abruptly to the audience again)
...Of SOULS!

No one else seems to hear this, but LULU takes her shades off

momentarily and leans in to try to hear their conversation. Shakes her head in dismissal and puts them back on. THE CROW exits stage left. Soft spot up on NIGHT who appears stage left and sings one last verse of "The Mystery of You" with the full band: "The mystery of you, so dark, so deep you hide. The mystery of you, the distant soul inside. The mystery of you, the one they can't explain. And when our love is through, mystery will remain." Spot out on her.

RED INTERVIEWS FOR A SPY

HEADLEY enters in disguise with obvious fake nose, and mustache, a gait somewhere between walking and dancing, seeming to almost lose his balance with every step. He takes a seat close to where THE CROW was and leans in to RED, as if ready to ask a question.

RED
What'll you have?

HEADLEY
(looks down sadly)
I don't know...

RED
Why are you here?

HEADLEY
I'm here to set things right.
(He struggles to control a twitch, then spits out)
Gosh D-D-DARN it!

RED
We need some one on the inside. Might you be the one we've been looking for?

HEADLEY
I m-m-might be the one.
(struggles to control a twitch, then spits out)
Ssssson of a..!

RED
You know of course that I am secretly in charge of the “Free Association”...

Heard in exaggerated whispers, “The Free Association: Where Truth meets Action. Action? Truth. Truth? Action!" HEADLEY seems to be the only one at the bar who hears this and is shocked by it. Nearly falls off his barstool.

HEADLEY
Ah hah! But n-n-nobody is in charge of the“Free Association”! We are all f-f-free agents!

RED
Touche!

HEADLEY
Cabernet!

RED
Ce'st la vie!

HEADLEY
Uh, that is all the French that I know...except for the n-n-names of more wine.

RED
Merlot?

HEADLEY
Sauvignon Blanc!
(They both sigh dreamily together over how beautiful these words sound to them)

RED
There is a test. I will give you a single word. You reply with another word. Ready?

HEADLEY
Set!

RED
No.

HEADLEY
Yes!

RED
Wait...

HEADLEY
Why?

RED
I was going to say, I'll ring the bell at the start.
(taps an old fashioned service bell on the bar.)

RED
Head...

HEADLEY
Ache...
(winces & holds his temples, being a terrible hypochondriac)

HEADLEY
MothaFrackin'!

RED
Conviction...

HEADLEY
I-i-i-innocent!
(in a panic, as if in court, being tried for a crime)
Shhhhizle!

RED
Heart...

HEADLEY
A-t-t-t-tack!

He clutches his chest and looks to be stricken. RED reaches over the bar to steady him.

HEADLEY
Dagnabbit!

RED taps the bell again, shrugs sweetly and points to the clock above whose hands have moved again opposite direction from each other to read 10pm now. HEADLEY gathers himself,

makes the sign for “call me” and stumbles out, trying to stifle blurting out...

HEADLEY
H-E double hockey sticks!

A rumpled looking street urchin makes her way to the bar and takes a seat, looking painfully shy and fidgety.

RED
What'll you have?

DERRIERE
I don't know...
(looking down seriously, sadly)

RED
Why are you here?

DERRIERE
I'm here to set things right.

RED
We need some one on the inside. Might you be the one we've been looking for?

DERRIERE
I might be the one.

RED
You know of course that I run the “Free Association”...

Heard in exaggerated whispers, “The Free Association: Where Truth meets Action. Action? Truth. Truth? Action!"

Surprised, taken aback by the voices, Derriere nearly faints, but is caught skillfully as part of a pole-dance by Coco, then propped up, and shakes herself back awake.

DERRIERE
Ah, but it isn't really you running at all, is it? You're just moving your arms and legs a bit, to and fro while the earth underneath your feet is zooming by and the world with all its people, places and

things are scurrying past you on
every side, while the sky above you
is barely moving at all! With all
the stars, standing perfectly
still. Laughing at you.
(says this last line,
dead-pan seriously)

RED stares at DERRIERE and squints a a bit as if assessing her words carefully. Nods. Then she turns back to her game, moves one of the chess pieces on the board and COCO slaps her forehead in consternation, vexed at some apparently unforeseen, brilliant move by RED.

RED
There is a test. I give you a
single word. You reply with another
word, after the sound of the bell.

Red hits the bell.

RED
Head...

DERRIERE
Case!
(leans to one side and
rolls her eyes)

RED
Conviction...

DERRIERE
Mmm...DeLISHus!
(smiles dreamily and
wipes imaginary crumbs
from her face)

RED
Heart..?

DERRIERE
Ache!

Wracked with sadness, she suddenly falls into a narcoleptic fainting spell. SUAVE and SUNNY run to the bar just in time to catch her. They steady her and bring her to her feet. She bids goodbye to RED pantomiming “call me” with her hand. The big clock's hands move again opposite direction from each

other to read 11pm. LULU scurries close to RED at the bar and clears her throat obnoxiously.

RED:
What'll you have?

LULU
(In a thick foreign accent)
I'm here to set things right.

RED
We need someone on the inside. Might you be the one?

LULU
I am the one.

RED
You know...the “Free Association”?

LULU
The Free Association: Where Truth meets Action. Action? Truth. Truth? Action!

RED smiles.

RED
There is a test. I give you a single word. You reply with another word, after the sound of the bell...Head.

LULU
Clear.

RED
Conviction.

LULU
Strong.

RED
Heart..?

LULU
Pure.
(A pause. Red smiles)

RED
Congratulations.

LULU
(Suddenly with no accent)
Thanks.

RED
LuLu!

LULU gives a start. She's shocked to be found out, despite her clever but over-the-top disguise. She takes her dark glasses off and tosses them on the bar, slowly removes her big hat and looks deflated. Her foreign accent leaves her.

LULU
How did you KNOW, RED? How?!

RED
Come on, LuLu. I know you. I raised you! You proud little Freebody! Princess, I've known you since you were seven. I'll never forget that day you showed up here, a poor lost little girl. And you're asking me, how did I KNOW?

RED is lost in reminiscence momentarily. The lights dim on the bar scene and a soft spot goes up on DAY stage right, who plays a bit of ukulele and plaintively sings the first verse of "Knowing Is All"with accordion, violin and upright bass gently joining in as he sings: "How can you know at first sight she's the one? How does the moon know to follow the sun? Can you know with one look, to read minds like a book? After the Fall they say knowing is all..."

Spot out on DAY, and back up on RED and LULU at the bar.

RED
I know you, LuLu. Don't you forget it. And you've always been-
(hesitates, looking at her lovingly) -different.

LULU
...And so you know how PERFECT I am for this!

RED
I know how PRECIOUS you are. And I know how dangerous this mission will be. I know how STUBBORN you are!

LULU
...Then you KNOW I'll just keep showing up, until you let me DO this!

RED raises a hand to the skies and looks up helplessly.

SUAVE moves a piece on the chess board.

SUAVE
Check. You cornered NOW, RED!

RED spins quickly to the board, moves a piece. She spins back to LULU, not missing a beat. SUAVE is visibly upset as his move has been so easily thwarted by RED.

RED
(turning back to LULU)
The Queen is the most powerful piece on the board, and therefore the most precious. She MUST be protected.

LULU
But in times of desperation, the most powerful, though most precious must be brought into play!

LULU leans over to the chessboard, moves a piece, takes RED's bishop off the board, places it on the bar on SUAVE's side and leans back triumphantly. Taps her fingers on the bar, expectantly. Red assesses her move, then sighs. SUAVE is impressed, smiles and looks at LULU in admiration.

RED
You win, LULU.

RED and LULU freeze, LULU looking triumphant, RED dismayed. The piano begins a stark version of "how to Save the World". Soft spot up on NIGHT, stage left. Upright bass and accordion join her as she sings the first verse and chorus of the somehow sad song...Spot out on her.

Lights back up at the bar with LULU and RED, who pulls out a silver briefcase from behind the bar and gently places it on top of the bar for LULU.

RED
Take this; where you're going, you'll need it. It will protect you. Use it only in emergencies. It's very powerful, its contents highly volatile. As you know, we of the "Free Association" practice the nonaggression principle. We are against the use of violence. First, do no harm.

She hands the briefcase to LULU and puts her hand over LULU's in a protective gesture, looking concerned.

RED
Your mission? First, to spy on the president of “Won Corporation”, the famous makers of "Fake Food" and other consumptive products-

Lights out on the bar. A tin-type, stylized commercial plays on the double screens above for "Won Corporation" in bold letters, featuring an elegant Asian woman's face smiling into the camera, images of sparkling twinky-like snacks and happy people of all ages, races and sizes gobbling them up, then joyfully dancing with each other. The Asian woman's face appears again saying "Fake is FUN!" Iris Out on the scenes.(circle closing on the image to black) Lights come up at the bar, scene continues:

RED
Our sources tell us-

As the word "sources" is uttered, SUNNY, COCO and SUAVE, all try to take credit for being the informant by silent body gestures, one after another arguing with hands, arms, head shakes and postures with each other 'til they come to agree they don't know who gave the information or that possibly all three of them had reported the same info from various sources. RED notices with her eyes only, slightly annoyed.

RED
-that the president of “Won Corporation”, "Mister Elegy", is in collusion with The Governor.

They're plotting the release of the most lethal lifestyling pharmaceutical in history, a drug that will make zombie-like automatons of ALL of us.

LULU
Worse than "Hallucinia"?

Again the bar goes dark and the screens show a commercial by Won Corporation for the "life-styling" drug "Hallucinia" featuring the same Asian spokeswoman's face close-up.

"The leader in life-styling! We tell you how to feel, so you don't HAVE to!", the Asian woman effuses. "Hallucinia" for the occasional unpleasantries of life!" Still smiling she recites: "Please do not operate heavy OR light machinery while on Hallucinia. Do not make any big decisions. Do not brush your hair or your teeth as accidents may occur" Images of a girl brushing her hair with a toothbrush split-screen with a man brushing his teeth with a hairbrush, both smiling blankly. Then a man's voice recites quickly in V.O., a long list of side effects, "Side effects may include nightsweats, daysweats, uncontrollable fits of nausea, weeping, laughing, howling or a combination of the three, confusion, thoughts of suicide, crippling fear or death." The Asian woman's face appears again saying the catch-phrase: "At Won Corporation, it game over!" The screens black out, lights up at the bar:

RED
Way worse than Hallucinia, LuLu. It's a new drug they're calling "Panaceozine". They plan to market it as a cure-all for everything, from baldness to hangnails, from Separation anxiety to Get-together jitters. It numbs people's souls and makes roses die. These so-called "side effects" are referred to at Won Corporation as “Panaceocide”. This "Mister Elegy" is the brilliant lunatic behind the new drug, and he was the first to experiment with Panaceozine, which made his soul numb. It also made him extremely allergic to roses.

LULU
Don't roses cause a sobering effect

on people hooked on Hallucinia?

RED
Exactly, Lulu! But you must remember, as is the case with every sobering element, there is a danger. Every raw truth can be a dagger to the heart for the one who wishes not to know. Some people are better off never knowing the whole truth, simply because they're too delicate, too fragile. They won't be able to withstand the shattering of an idea, an image or even a fleeting fancy. Learn to recognize these souls and try to be gentle with them. That is the only way they can survive in this world.

LULU
Red, don't tell me about these pathetic people and their weaknesses! How they can't accept the truth! How they must be protected in their ignorance, in their little shells, lest they break!

RED
Princess, please. At least remember this: The most persistent lies are the ones we tell ourselves. These are the most delicate, most easily cracked, and then - the most painful. In fact, these fragile belief systems, once fractured, can be fatal.

LULU
(growing impatient)
RED, what ELSE do I have to know?

RED
You have to know that the easiest one to DECEIVE is oneself.

LULU
I already know these things, RED! You've been telling me them since I

was little. I'm not the same lost
little waif, who just escaped from
the Children's Facility, showing up
on your doorstep at "The Font"!

A similar tizzy of pantomiming of the dancers, this time fawning in remembrance of how cute she was then.

RED
Our sources tell us-

Another flurry of pantomiming posturing with the dancers. RED turns around slowly to the dancers and they all look around as if not even noticing her.

RED
-that there is to be chosen a new
super-agent working for the
government surveillance agency.

LULU
"The System"?

RED
Yes. Working directly for none
other than the evil leader of that
organization himself, code name:
The Crow.

LULU
(Charmed and suddenly
impressed)
Nice code name.

RED
(shrugging)
Eh.

LULU
What about the new super-spy? Any
ideas who "The Crow" might choose?
What are they looking for?

RED
Might be this IT guy who works in
the Department of Genetic
Modification Engineering...

Lights dim on the scene. Just a faint spot is on RED and LULU

as RED describes LANCE. On the twin screens above them is shown a sepia tone, slightly faster motion (as in silent films) first a commercial showing the bestselling book, "Chasing Tail: How to be a Good Dog" with small type under that "A User's Manual" and a close -up of a man winking with a long mustache which he twirls mischievously. It's the face of THE CROW. Then on the screens,"Be a Lady Killer!"

RED
...Reported to be a ruthless killer-

Then a scene of Lance at work, at his desk, eyes skimming back and forth across the lines of the pages of the book, cover shown to us. He looks up with a somewhat embarrassed start. We see he's been wearing a simple nose and glasses "disguise" while he reads the book.

RED
-a master of disguises. His name is "Lance LeBlanc".

He removes the "disguise", smiles confidently, closes the book, stands up, approaches a female co-worker with a strangely blank expression on her face. They have a silent conversation and suddenly she seems to be enthralled with him, moving her hand seductively up his arm and shoulder and laughing at everything he says. He bids goodbye to the woman he's seduced and a co-worker asks him in a stilted voice, "Where ever did you learn to do that?"

RED
They're looking for some one highly skilled, some one who's ready to do anything.

Back on the screens, LANCE looks proud and replies, "A book I read. I'm a quick study!" Close-up of him winking to the camera again with an Iris Out, just as RED says the words "...Ready to do anything" The lights go back up on the bar.

RED
From what we know, he could be VERY dangerous.

LULU
Nice!

RED

No! Not nice. Stop that.

LULU
OK...

RED
Working in the IT department, he would be privy to a vast amount of information at Won Corporation, secret formulas, genetic codes and the like. Possibly even the records of ancestry...
(She pauses a moment at this idea, then a quick intake of breath)
LULU, you must gain his trust first. Use your feminine wiles... but only if absolutely necessary-

SUNNY
(eagerly leaning in)
OR...

COCO
(leaning in too)
...If he's REALLY...

SUNNY, COCO & SUAVE
HOT!

RED
(turning to them quickly)
Hey, don't you all have some dancing to do?

The three dancers separate and go to dance and flirt with members of the audience, as the band very softly begins to play the seductive tango-strains of "Intoxicated".

RED
(back to LULU, more intensely now)
Remember, LULU, he could be ANYone.
(picks up the King piece from the board to illustrate a point)
The King seems the weakest, most vulnerable piece on the board, since he can only move one square

at the time. Yet HE is the one who must be captured to win the game.

LULU
Hmm.. this agent, "Lance LeBlanc", is obviously some one special. I'll go where anybody who is ANYbody goes. Anybody knows you have to be a SOMEbody to go to "The Crown".

At LULU's words, "I'll go where anybody..." the lights dim to a quiet spot on her as the double screens above light up to show an ad in sepia-toned opulence, the elegant script for "The Crown" and underneath in smaller, more austere type: NO FREEBODIES ALLOWED ON THE PREMISES. ONLY SOMEBODIES, PLEASE. ALL PATRONS SUBJECT TO SEARCH. ANY ASSOCIATION WITH THE FREE ASSOCIATION MUST BE REPORTED TO THE SYSTEM AT ONCE.

DAY appears stage left in a soft spot and sings in a delicate, toy piano-style electro-swing style the first verse and chorus o "How to Save the World". Spot out on him.

BLACKOUT

THE CROW GIVES LANCE HIS ASSIGNMENT

FADE IN

OFFICE WITH A LARGE DESK, ABOVE HANGS A SIGN WITH THE FAMILIAR LOGO OF WON CORPORATION. BEHIND THE DESK, IN REGAL REPOSE, SITS THE CROW, HERE AS HIS ALTER-EGO, PRESIDENT OF WON CORPORATION, WEARING A PORKPIE HAT, AND RED GLOVES, AS OPPOSED TO HIS USUAL ATTIRE IN BLACK STEAMPUNK AVIATOR CAP/GOGGLES ON HEAD AND BLACK GLOVES W CLAWS. A LARGE, STUFFED CHAIR IS ACROSS FROM THE DESK, AND IN THE CHAIR SITS LANCE, LOOKING NERVOUS.

THE CROW
You're a lucky guy, Mr. Lance LeBlanc.

LANCE
Oh, really, Sir? Uh, Mister Elegy?

THE CROW
Well, yes, Lance. You have a chance to be SOMEbody. Everyone has a

chance to be somebody, yet no one seems to know they HAVE this chance. Now you know it. All you have to do is take it.

LANCE
Take...What.

THE CROW
Opportunity, of course, my boy!
(rises from his seat, glides to stand in front of his desk, strikes an imposing stance)

THE CROW
Our records show that you've been an It-boy with us here at Won Corporation for 5 years now...

Lance winces a bit at this number of years and the term "It-boy". THE CROW pronounces IT as "It".

THE CROW
And in that time, your record for following directions meticulously, to the letter, without fail, has been nothing short of NEUROTIC! I mean FANTASTIC! Bravo!

Lance tries to smile, but looks more in pain.

THE CROW
Now I know it hasn't always been easy. I know you want more, though I also know how everyone at the plant thinks, well just the world of you!

Lance is proud of this and shows it

THE CROW
What I present to you today, my boy, is the chance to prove yourself to the company, to rise above, to reach new heights! To go from "It-BOY to "It- MAN!

THE CROW almost absentmindedly takes out of his pocket a

beautiful silver yo-yo and begins to yo-yo, doing a few tricks as the band begins a rather upbeat swing rendition of the chorus of "How to Save the World".

The lights dim on the stage except for a dim spot on The CROW who is lost in his own world playing with the yo yo and a spot goes up on DAY, who appears stage right and sings the second verse and a chorus with the band. Spot out on him as the song ends. Lights back up on the stage with LANCE and the CROW, who pockets his yo-yo and turns briskly back to LANCE to continue.

THE CROW
I have a special mission for you, Lance. A secret mission, in fact. You must tell no one. Trust no one. From this moment on, all discussion of your mission will be exclusively between yourself and me. IF you succeed, you will be promoted, given your own office, the lifestyle you so richly deserve, for your obedience- I mean loyalty- to Won Corporation! And if you fail, your penalty will be a never-ending exile into a Bubble World of despair and suffering, ridicule and disgrace.

With a wave of his hand toward the two screens above, THE CROW shows us a “Bubble World" as a writhing mass of unhappy dark featureless souls together in a pit, crying out together “Who are we? We are nobodies...” Lance is mortified at this image.

THE CROW
All you have to do, Lance, is destroy the new spy for The Free Association. Our sources tell us she's inclined to wear the color RED quite a bit. For some reason...
(shrugs as if evaluating her fashion sense)
AND-
(dramatic pause)
-she's a "Freebody".
(makes finger quotes in the air and looks disgusted by this term)

LANCE
Uh, WHAT?

THE CROW
(rolls his eyes in more disgust)
Ah, the illegal, undocumented, uneducated, un-chipped UNDERLINGS! Living "off the grid"-
(again with the finger quotes, nearly dancing in disgust)
Most of them eating garbage like animals in the streets. Some find their food in dumpsters. Some even work in the service industry as common waitresses, bartenders...musicians!

THE CROW seems particularly disgusted by this profession and the live band responds with some abstract tuning up noises, then abruptly stops, when he darts a glance toward them.

LANCE
Wait. You mean there are people living outside of The System? On their own? Not under surveillance?
(intrigued, then quickly checks himself, hides it)

THE CROW
Yes! Disgusting, isn't it!

LANCE
Yes! Disgusting!

THE CROW
It's wrong!

LANCE
Wrong!

THE CROW
And YOU, Lance. You are going to set things right!

LANCE
Right!

THE CROW
Her name is "LuLu". She must die!

LANCE
(timidly, wilting here)
Die?

THE CROW
Well of course, my boy! What do you think I meant by, "You must destroy her"? Put a fly in her soup at The Crown Restaurant?
(laughs uproariously, then calms quickly, eerily)
Unless of course it was some kind of poisonous fly...now that would be novel, eh?
(ponders this momentarily, then snaps back)
We're going to make this easy for you, Lance.

THE CROW swings acrobatically back over his desk, and pulls out a silver briefcase, laying it effortlessly onto the desk and caresses the air around it with his hands, as if to an audience in a game show or in presentation of a magic act.

THE CROW
Take this; where you're going, you'll need it. It will protect you. Use it only at the right moment. It's very powerful, its contents highly volatile. You must know, those of the "Free Association" practice the nonaggression principle. They are against the use of violence. We at Won Corporation, however, have no problem with violence...

LANCE
Well, I like violins, too! And cello is nice...Accordian as well, for dancing, at least...
(muses dreamily on this idea of his favorite

kinds of music, and
sways a bit, as the band
softly starts up again
with the
song,"Intoxicated")

THE CROW seems a bit annoyed, then spins dramatically toward the band playing, fixes a cutting glare on them and they peter out the song one instrument at a time.

THE CROW
Lance, all you have to do is find this girl, "LULU", give her the silver briefcase and let her open it. Simple.

LANCE
Simple.
(beat)
And she...Dies?

THE CROW
(calm, matter-of-factly)
Well, yeah, the thing explodes when it's opened, so you don't want to be too close when that happens, Okay?

THE CROW opens the ornate glass cabinet behind his desk, and brings out a beautiful, gold and jewel-encrusted bottle with two small glasses, pours into both glasses a green colored liquid, sets one glass in front of Lance and holds one in his hand. He can hardly contain his anticipation. The band quietly strikes up a saucy version of "Intoxicated".

THE CROW
...And now, my boy- no, soon to be my MAN, let us drink to your new life! And to the death of The Free Association and their feeble attempts to stifle the march of progress, to cripple Won Corporation and The System itself!

LANCE
Uh, well, I don't usually...

THE CROW
OH, but you MUST..!

LANCE
Well, maybe just this once...

THE CROW
That's all it'll take-

LANCE
Uh, what?

THE CROW
Never mind...To Lance LeBlanc and his new life!

The two men touch glasses and throw back the green liquid, both swallowing loudly. THE CROW pulls a red silk handkerchief out of his breast pocket and whisks it neatly around the lip of his glass before taking both glasses and replacing them in the glass cabinet.

LANCE
I don't feel too good, suddenly, Mr. Elegy...Um, Mr. E?

THE CROW
Ah, it's nothing. You'll be fine! For three days. Then you'll die suddenly, with no symptoms, other than that queasiness you just felt, after we toasted you murdering some woman you haven't met yet.

The band stops playing, abruptly.

LANCE
What?!

THE CROW
I saaaaid...
(slower this time as if speaking to a small child)
You'll be fine for three days. Then you'll die suddenly-
(dramatic pause and flourish)
-with no symptoms, other than that queasiness you just felt, after we toasted you murdering some woman

you haven't met yet.

LANCE
You monster! You poisoned me!

THE CROW
Well, look at YOU, Lance!Figuring it out all by yourself. And they said you were only good at following directions...

LANCE
What? Who said that? Why? Why would you DO this to me? And you drank the same stuff YOURSELF!

THE CROW
Well, I drink it every day. Just another one of my little genetic aberrations...

The lights dim and the screens above unfold a scene in sepia-tone, as THE CROW narrates it for us...

You see my genetics were combined by second-rate scientists, given to error and imprecision. Something I've corrected now, hence no active mommies and daddies anymore. Just the MotherBoard, organizing who's DNA gets paired with who's. AND The Children's Facilities, where good little citizens are raised! And with everyone so happily surrendering their "biological potentialities" so that the all-powerful, all-loving System can raise them properly...Well, as you can see, life is just MAGICAL!

A scene of a sea of identical smiling faces on the screens goes dark as THE CROW says the word, "Magical". Lights back up on LANCE and THE CROW.

LANCE
(Shocked and reviled)
What is WRONG with you? Why did you DO this to me?

THE CROW

Wait. That's two separate
questions. Let's take them one at a
time. What is wrong with me..?

Again, th lights dim on THE CROW and LANCE, as the screens above light up to reveal the scenes dramatically in a somewhat drop-framed, sped-up motion style, as he narrates it, and the band softly accompanies his story with the dark bossa nova strains of "The Mystery of You"...

THE CROW
I was genetically flawed. I was
sickly and small as a child. I had
an over-sensitive heart, given to
flights of emotive extravagance and
delicate imbalances at the
slightest disturbance! Obviously,
this had to be remedied. I needed a
new, strong, indestructible
petro-carbon-titanium - heart!
Being the finest surgeon in all the
land, I had to perform the
operation on MYSELF, which posed a
a challenge. So I formulated a
serum to numb all sense of pain,
while allowing the subject - in
this case ME - to remain completely
conscious, to perform the entire
life-changing operation!

The screens go dark, abruptly, as the scene is shown of the CROW operating on his own heart. Screens go black abruptly again, lights back up on THE CROW and LANCE.

THE CROW turns dramatically to face the audience, grins aggressively and tears open his shirt once more to reveal the shining artificial heart with cogs and levers moving. The accompanying background music becomes slightly distorted and off-sounding, mechanical and even a bit disturbing with a few displaced notes in odd dissonance. Another spark escapes the mechanism of the CROW's heart. He pulls his shirt together, turns back to LANCE, calmly.

THE CROW
Brilliant, yes, I agree. However,
the numbing serum not only numbed
all pain in me, but all pleasure,
nearly all sensation in
fact...Except for ONE, that is. I

CAN feel the pain of others. And
THIS, is my one remaining pleasure
in life!

THE CROW pauses, strikes a pose and smiles. LANCE is frozen in shock with his hands in his hair, transfixed on THE CROW.

THE CROW
Your second question; why did I do this to you? I don't trust you, LANCE. I know. It's a bummer. But it's true. I just wasn't feeling you being all the way into the cold-blooded killing of a girl you haven't met yet. It's just a feeling I have, a hunch. That's all. So the 3 day sudden death poisoning is just a little insurance that you'll come through for me. All you have to do to get the antidote-

LANCE
So There IS an antidote?

THE CROW
Well, of course there is, Lance! You can't very well have a poison without an antidote, can you? It's like having Day without Night, or vanilla without chocolate, or, or...

LANCE
-what is it!?

THE CROW
Well, I don't know. I was trying to get other ideas from you, but I can see now, you're useless for these kinds of descriptive lists of elegant opposites, complementary antonyms, as they're called. So forget it.

LANCE
No, not more senseless pairs of opposites! What is the antidote? How do I get that?

THE CROW
"Senseless"? You're going to hurt my feelings THAT way! Ah! Gotcha. Remember? I HAVE no feelings!
(Very pleased with himself, then he sees LANCE is at his wit's end and drops his smile. Back to his stance of intense focus.)
OK, again with the two questions at once. The antidote to the three-day sudden-death poison is on the tip of my tongue...Aw, can't tell you yet. Sorry, Lance. And all you have to do, is fulfill your mission, as instructed and get back to me by the 11th hour of the 3rd day, and the cure for death itself will spring forth from my lips to save you. Simple as that.

LANCE is devastated and nearly sinks to the ground in despair. Suddenly he pulls himself up, unsheathes his sword and says to THE CROW...

LANCE
En Garde!

THE CROW
Ah, that's the spirit!

THE CROW draws his sword and the two men begin to fence. THE CROW speaking quite calmly as swords are crossed and blades are thrust into the air with dizzying speed and precision, while the band plays a boisterous version of "How to Save the World", quieting almost abruptly as THE CROW cuts in with...

THE CROW
Where ever did you learn to do that?

THE CROW swiftly strikes with finesse. LANCE steps back to avoid the advancing strokes of his blade.

LANCE
(A bit strained)
Video games...

THE CROW
Ah, yes. We saw you playing on your break-time. We noticed you consistently had the highest scores in the sword-fighting simulations...

More crossing of swords...

LANCE
I'm a quick study!

THE CROW
That you are...But what you might not have realized, is who's the creator of those games.

LANCE
(A bit out of breath)
Who?

The two men lock swords and are drawn eye-to-eye to each other. LANCE has a moment of realization and pushes away from THE CROW with much effort. The violin repeats in solo the 5-note melody of the chorus of "How to Save the World".

LANCE
Uh-Oh!

THE CROW lunges forward and easily, swiftly maneuvers the sword of LANCE out of his grasp to fall onto the floor, with a clang. Then pins him by his blade against his collar, to the glass cabinet.

THE CROW
(Nearly clenching his teeth in vehement determination)
Don't take all of the fun out of this little game for me now, LANCE. Don't force me to kill you so easily here in my office. Come on; be a good sport. We're all playing a game. It's just that I'm the greatest master of games, since I created most of them. Be true to your nature, LANCE. The rules of your own game, your own code, your

genetic code. And according to your code, answer your greatest calling!

THE CROW releases LANCE from his sword against the cabinet, and LANCE steps slowly backwards away from him, watching him closely. Lance is breathing hard, exhausted, standing across from THE CROW now watching, listening to him, trying to understand it all...

THE CROW
You're not a creator. You're not a leader. You're not a rebel. You're a product, a follower, a cog in this elaborate machine I've created. Be true to your nature. Follow your orders, you coward. Remember what happened to your own MOTHER. (so spiteful that he's nearly spitting the words now.) And WHY it happened, LANCE. See you before the eleventh hour of the third day. Or die.

Blackout on the CROW and LANCE. Soft spot back up on DAY, stage left. He sings the last verse of "How to Save the World" in a slow plaintive style, this time.

"How will we know, our time to go, When will the clock strike true? Could you have been, that special one? When all is said, undone?"

Spot up on NIGHT, stage right. She smiles and greets DAY. Sunset appears across the double screens once more. They harmonize the last chorus together:

"How to save the World, How to set things Right. Living in the Dark, How to see the Light. How to Save the World..."

The piano and violin reiterate the last lines of the melody of "How to Save the World" with an ominous overtone.

DAY and NIGHT tell the audience to feel free to order drinks and discuss what lies ahead for "The Eccentrics", during a short intermission.

BLACK OUT
INTERMISSION

LULU MEETS HEADLEY

FADE IN

“THE CROWN CAFE”, A BEAUTIFUL UPSCALE RESTAURANT WHERE THE GLAMOROUS AND THE ELITE GATHER FOR POWER-BROKERING AND ROMANTIC RENDEZVOUS... HEADLEY WORKS THERE AS A WAITER AND DERRIERE HANGS OUT AROUND THE BUILDING AND DUMPSTER DIVES FROM THE ALLEY BEHIND IT.

LULU enters The Crown Restaurant alone, and immediately see the three burlesque dancers fawning over HEADLEY, gathering around him happily. The band is playing the happy swing song, "What's It Like to be You" as DAY sings:

"What's it like to be you, sweet Darlin'? To do the things that you do...To dance the night in your shoes, sweet Darlin'. What's it like to be you? What's it like on your cloud, sweet Darlin'? To be your face in a crowd...To feel the wind in your hair, sweet Darlin'. To feel your devil-may-care..."

Everyone at the Crown seems to be calling HEADLEY the King of the Crown and the “Head-man” and LULU raises an eyebrow to the audience at this. She has the wrong idea about him. She discreetly takes a seat, looks around the place over her dark shades, sees HEADLEY approaching her table, opens a menu and notices with a start, HEADLEY peering over her shoulder thoughtfully, a bit too closely. She tries to play it cool, composes herself and asks him in a conspiratorial tone:

LULU
You're... special?
(winks and a spark escapes the corner of her eye)

HEADLEY
DuJour! Th' special it is then, Madam!
(winks)
Now, how would you like it done?
(winks again, holding back a twitch this time)

LULU
(leaning in conspiratorially)

Make it look like an accident...

HEADLEY
Interesting...and well, how exotic!
(Screwing up his face in contemplation of how this might be accomplished)
Like well-done on the inside and...And, and...

LULU
Oh, well-done and keep it very inside!
(winks again)

HEADLEY
So...N-N-NOT rare?

LULU
Well, we don't have to be so precious about this..!

HEADLEY
Of course, Madam! After all sh-sh-she's just a c-c-cow!C-C-C-crazylady!

LULU
But that does seem a bit unkind now, doesn't it? I haven't even described the hit yet.

HEADLEY
The "hit"? Well, first we'll tenderize the cut and sometimes p-p-pounding is used for this...

LULU:
Pounding the cut?! Ah! Please no more details!
(covers her ears)
I'm SURE you know what you're doing...
(Closes her eyes quickly, then opens them bravely)
Well-done.

HEADLEY

If you s-s-say so, Madam!

He runs to the counter where the cook awaits his order, announcing loudly:

HEADLEY
One filet mignon well-done, Monsieur! And hurry, because this c-customer is frakkin' K-K-koo-koo!

LULU realizes who he is, finally and runs to catch him.

LULU
Wait! Come back! I remember you now. You were at The Font. You were RED's 9 o'clock, weren't you!

He hesitates, unsure. Looks around in paranoia that they may be heard, then nods slowly holding her gaze carefully and takes her arm to lead her out the back. He says to her in a serious-toned (loud) whisper:

HEADLEY
RED got in touch with me and my little DERRIERE soon after I left the Font to welcome us into "The Free Association".

LULU is stuck on the fact that he just used the word "Derriere" and stops in her tracks, raises an eyebrow and looks hard at him.

LULU
Wait. RED said that. That she wanted you and "your little derriere"?
(takes a quick look around him to check him out physically)
I don't see it.

HEADLEY
(insulted and indignant)
I see what this is about. I get this a lot. It's the w-w-w-whack'd! - way I speak, isn't it!

LULU
Well, not exactly. It's more your

choice of words! Namely...Um the reference to your little uh...

HEADLEY becomes serious here. Takes LULU by her shoulders and looks into her eyes to impart important information, making sure she is listening.

HEADLEY
LULU?

LULU
That's my name. But how did you know that?

HEADLEY
I recognize you, despite your clever disguises, Miss "LuLu Paloma Gracias DeNada Shaqueela Jackson"! Who could mistake the adopted daughter of RED, the leader of "The Free Association"! And LULU, as a Freebody, yourself, you must know that a Freebody creates her own name, as she creates her own destiny, after she OR he, escapes The System! It just so happens that my beloved chose an exceptionally beautiful name for herself!
(He pauses dramatically)
"Derriere Au Naturalle"!

She is impressed by this and smiles at him, re-taking his arm in hers to meet his friend, DERRIERE outside. They begin to walk together. The band begins a light, whimsical version of "What's It Like to be You" again.

LULU
So your girlfriend, DERRIERE, what business is she in, HEADLEY?

They stop and turn to have a bit more conversation before continuing.

HEADLEY
Uh, she's in the business of looking through the garbage outside of restaurants like the Crown for food and clothing other people don't want anymore.

LULU
(somewhat taken aback by this, but trying not to show it)
Oh! So she must know Mister Ekshun, the trash collector who comes into The Font to flirt with RED!

HEADLEY
Oh, him! Well, no actually, DERRIERE also reads body language. Fluently. So well that it upsets people. Because, of course, they think she's reading their minds...But the mind does speak through the body.

LULU
Really..?

HEADLEY
Yes. And she told me that guy isn't a garbage collector at all. You see he has never once moved his arms in an 80 degree angle from his body. And of course that's the precise angle required to perform the work of a garbage collector. He also cannot feel pain. Except the pain of others, according to her calculations. And the tacks she's been strategically placing on his barstool at The Font...

LULU stops, cocks her head and raises her eyebrows, trying not to pass judgment yet.

LULU
Really..?

HEADLEY
Yes. She also really likes that red dress you're wearing, but she said it would look better on her.

LULU
Really..?

The two walk to the next scene, out of The Crown to a small area to the left, where the lights come up slowly (as they dim on The Crown) to reveal a large dumpster overflowing with rags, with a few, mostly scrap metal pieces of trash lying around it. As soon as they get close, DERRIERE pops up out of the dumpster looking serious, her face a bit smudged, sees HEADLEY and smiles brightly. He rushes to her and they rub noses in greeting. It is as adorable as it sounds.

HEADLEY
My Darling DERRIERE, allow me to present a new friend and fellow Freebody, Miss LuLu Paloma Gracias DeNada Shaqueela Jackson.

LULU
Pleased to meet you, Miss...

HEADLEY
(cutting in)
You can call her "D", if you like.

LULU
(smiles)
Miss D.

DERRIERE smiles, nods, then motions to HEADLEY to approach her. She whispers in his ear, pulls back from him to get his reaction, to which he raises his eyebrows a bit. She smiles and then almost laughs, covering her mouth timidly, then smiles back at LULU in approval.

LULU
Um, what did she say, HEADLEY?

HEADLEY
Uh, well, she is a bit shy at first. You'll have to excuse that about her. She thinks your name is...
(He pauses here to put what she's told him in a kinder way)
Very...different. She also said your real mother and father are closer to you than you know. And that you don't have to try so hard.

LULU

Wait. She's getting these ideas
from my body language?

DERRIERE motions to HEADLEY again and he gets close to her so she can whisper in his ear. He nods and faces LULU.

HEADLEY
Of course. Well, what do you
expect, LULU? Going around town
with your toes and fingertips just
SCREAMING like that!

HEADLEY and DERRIERE lean back to each other, shoulders touching, and cross their arms in synchronicity, carefully assessing LULU once more. LULU clasps her hands behind her back self-consciously, straightens her feet a bit, as she's been fidgeting. Looks a bit defensive.

LULU
So, what ELSE can she tell me, just
by looking at me?

HEADLEY
She can tell that your dress is
quite lovely. And that it would
look better on her.

LULU softens and smiles at the two of them.

LIGHTS FADE ON
THE DUMPSTER
AREA, JUST
AS...

THE CROW & THE GOVERNOR

LIGHTS UP AGAIN
AT THE CROWN

NIGHT sings the opening strains of "The Mystery of You" with a simple arrangement of accordion, upright bass and guitar:

"The mystery of you, so dark, so deep you hide...The mystery of you, the distant soul inside. The mystery of you, the one they can't explain..."

THE CROW enters wearing his porkpie hat and red gloves as Mister Elegy, president of Won Corporation, arm in arm with

THE GOVERNOR. A waitress, COCO, and waiter, SUAVE, seat the pair. SUNNY as maitre'd, greets them and shows them in.

THE GOVERNOR
Mister Elegy, I'm concerned.

THE CROW
But of course you are, GOVERNOR! May I suggest a sample of our new upgraded "Hallucinia 2"? It's quite effective for obliterating all uh, CONCERNS!

(pulls out a bottle of pills from his waist coat with a flourish and presents it to THE GOVERNOR.)

THE GOVERNOR
Not now...We have to talk. Sometimes it's hard to do even THAT on those pills! Why is it you can't seem to find a treatment for these Lifemares of mine? They're killing me!

THE CROW
Lifemares...And you get them how often? Every night, every morning ..?

THE GOVERNOR
Everyday, ALL day. That's why they're called LIFEmares, my man. Come now. It was one of YOUR doctors who diagnosed it and prescribed these life-styling drugs, that still seem to have no effect on me at all! I cannot fall asleep for the life of me and I'm afraid it will be the DEATH of me! And I still have this annoying feeling that somehow I might have done something wrong!It's quite uncomfortable...

THE CROW
Ah...I think they call that a "conscience", though I can't be

sure. We're working on a surgical procedure to remove those. I'll tell you what. You being my partner and all, I'll give you some of these-

He pulls out with even more of a flourish another bottle of pills and sets them on the table. THE GOVERNOR seizes them and studies them closely.

THE CROW
-not even on the market yet. Extremely powerful relaxation pills. They'd knock out a charging rhino. For weeks. They slow the metabolism down to such a degree that, well it's almost like being dead!
(smiles, merrily)

THE GOVERNOR
Well, that does sound lovely! But I'm still concerned...

THE CROW
About what, my friend?

THE GOVERNOR
Revolution is in the air, Mr. E... Despite our high-tech surveillance system, our shoe-removing, belt and keys fleecing, x-raying, sterility-inducing, metal-detecting,joy-stripping, fear-inducing, soul-deadening methods of enhanced interrogational security-
(Takes a long, rasping intake of breath, as he's run out of breath,describing this elaborate system)
-these TERRORISTS calling themselves "The Free Association" still remain! FREEBODIES everywhere are now joining the Association. Citizens in every city, town and farm seem in rebellion now. They're creating music, paintings,

sculpture, poetry, even plays denouncing the System and Won Corporation! Of course we lost the artists, writers and musicians years ago. But now...We're losing scientists, doctors, even plumbers, hairdressers and shoe repairmen!

THE CROW
Ah! Not MY shoe repairman! That man would do ANYthing for me. AND the right dose of Hallucinia!

THE GOVERNOR
And some of these rebels are even throwing out their carefully prescribed, life-styling medications!

THE CROW
That's a crime! According to statute number 69840w7462-

THE CROW pauses to remember the rest of the number and begins to recite more, just as the GOVERNOR tries to speak again.

THE CROW
8000257poto6698-

Again the GOVERNOR tries to respond, but after a short pause, the CROW interrupts him, reciting the number of the statute.

THE CROW
462220168tjvnrt78-

And a third time THE GOVERNOR tries to respond, just as THE CROW interrupts, reciting the number of the statute.

THE CROW
48999306922211773350!

THE GOVERNOR
They know the penalty and they still throw away their meds! We can't keep just putting them all in Bubble Worlds, Mr. E. It's taking too much energy! People are starting to get suspicious...You've got to come up with something, some

magical new drug to make them quiet, obedient and stupid again! Something that makes them not care about what's going on around them, something that NUMBS them, COMPLETELY.

THE CROW
But GOVERNOR, your dream has been REALIZED! Behold the marketing plan, commercial and formula! The answer to your evil prayers! Introducing: "Panaceozine"!

THE CROW waves his arm and the two screens above show a commercial for the new drug, complete with an expansive list of supposed benefits. The screen abruptly goes to static snow, then a horizontal white line zips to black.

THE GOVERNOR
And the formula?

THE CROW
Ah, nothing for you to be concerned about, my dear Governor. Besides, it's all here. (taps his temple) And nowhere else. The drive has been surgically implanted in my brain.

THE GOVERNOR
I see...
(strokes his chin and seems both impressed and disturbed by this)
And will this Panaceozine help with foot pain as well?

THE CROW
Still getting that, huh? What about that government study you had my company do on the connection between sleep deprivation and foot pain?

THE GOVERNOR
Ah, still waiting on the results of that. Could use more funding I think...

THE CROW
Of course! Always! Why not?!

THE GOVERNOR
There is just one more thing we have to talk about, Mr. Elegy. The Free Association seems to have gained a new and very dangerous member. There's rumor of a certain female Freebody who escaped from the Children's facility years ago by her clever use of a weapon our scientists had never seen before. Some kind of dowel, ball and string mechanism.

The band strikes up a joyfully uptempo rendition of "Knowing Is All" as the two screens open to a scene in fast motion of a little girl with a fiercely determined look on her face, bobbing a yo-yo, and three terrified guards in full armor cowering in a corner, as she palms the yo-yo, opens a window and is gone. Iris black out.

THE GOVERNOR
The child, only 7 years old at the time, escaped and was never seen again. Recently though, sources say she goes by the name, "LuLu Paloma Gracias DeNada Shaqueela Jackson".

THE CROW
(contemplates momentarily)
Well, that IS a magnificent name, I must admit...

THE GOVERNOR
Mister Elegy, she's reported to be extremely dangerous and looking for YOU!

THE CROW shrugs nonchalantly.

THE CROW
It's already being taken care of, my dear GOVERNOR. I found the perfect pawn for the job, right in our IT department. The poor fellow follows directions to a neurotic

level of obedience. He reads my book-

THE GOVERNOR
(with a sly smile)
Chasing Tail:How to be a Good Dog?

THE CROW
Yes! He plays my video games. He watches my movies! For some reason he's a bit hesitant about the act of cold blooded murder, which puzzles me, I must admit...but I think I've effectively persuaded him...

THE GOVERNOR
How did you do THAT, Mr. E?

THE CROW
I gave him a good dose of 3 day sudden death poison, of course!

THE GOVERNOR
Oh, really..?
(intrigued. Strokes his chin in thought)
And what's the antidote for that, Mr. E?

THE CROW looks scornfully at THE GOVERNOR, sniffs and turns his head to spit in the opposite direction. The GOVERNOR laughs uproariously. THE CROW starts to laugh as well, until the two are nearly hysterical with evil laughter. Looking on, stage right, are HEADLEY and DERRIERE, huddled together. DERRIERE is wearing the red dress LULU has given her. LULU is also watching, but on the other side dressed as a waitress. HEADLEY leans in closer to listen, then back to DERRIERE.

HEADLEY
That guy's a P-P-P-pig!

DERRIERE
No, pigs are much more discreet, HEADLEY. And they take better care of their young.

HEADLEY
Why? What did you hear, D? What did

he say?

Derriere leans in toward HEADLEY and whispers in his ear. His eyes get big. They stand to leave. She begins to sway. He positions himself to catch her, first one side, then the other. Finally she falls into his arms. He looks down at her and smiles. She flutters her eyes open to meet his loving gaze. He tilts her back upright and takes her hand.

HEADLEY
We've got to get back to RED to let her know, before it's too late!

LANCE enters The Crown, creeping behind corners surreptitiously, cartoon-style from one area of hiding to the next, until he's behind a pillar or curtain, but can see DERRIERE from behind.(no pun intended) He gives a start as he sees her and says softly, turning to the audience:

LANCE
RED!

BLACK OUT

THE GOVERNOR, LANCE, RED & DANCERS AT THE FONT

Back at The Font, NIGHT sings the first verse of "Intoxicated". Coco dances seductively under her own spot-light. The patrons toast, talk, tease and laugh with each other silently. Spot out on NIGHT and Coco. Lights brighten a bit at the bar. The band continues to softly play the theme, in the background.

The Governor is seated stage right, wearing a dark pair of shades, drinking and being entertained by the 3 burlesque dancers, first Sunny, then Suave, then Coco who he seems attracted to, and is trying to grab, though she deftly, gracefully avoids his grasp...Until he wraps both arms around her and makes a lascivious growling sound. LANCE entering The Font, sees what's happening, strikes an unintentionally hilarious, awkward-looking pose, like a cross between a martial arts stance gone wrong and some kind of extreme yogic posture. He lets out a strange animalistic howling sound, then something like what a small squirrel might make if cornered. There is a loud, collective gasping intake of breath sound from everyone. LANCE has fixed his gaze on the now-frozen Governor and Coco. Silence. Then:

SUAVE
(sidling up to LANCE in a somewhat impressed, conspiratorial tone)
Where ever did you learn to do that?

LANCE
(still seriously holding the pose)
Watching movies.

SUNNY
(Her hands clasped together in admiration, now smitten)
You must be watching them very closely..!

LANCE
(tries to act debonair)
I'm a quick study.

THE GOVERNOR is instantly terrified, releases COCO and leaves, creeping out, sheepishly.

SUAVE
(trying to be dismissive)
Well, I guess we don't get that channel in my neighborhood.

LANCE straightens himself out, is fawned over by Sunny a bit, shrugs her off and sinks into a seat at the bar. RED walks over to greet him.

RED
What'll you have, Hero?

LANCE
Don't call me that.

RED
No? Then what IS your place in life?

LANCE
I'm nobody, really.
(glances over and sees the chess game on the

board, looks dejected)
My place in life? I guess I'm just a pawn, bartender. Somebody who's used and then thrown away...

RED
You know the pawn can be a very powerful piece on the board.

RED moves her pawn forward on the chessboard, then reaches over to take back her queen, and places that in place of the pawn on the board. SUNNY playing opposite of her, flies over to see what she's done, then stands there looking confused.

RED
The pawn is worth just one point, the lowest of all the chessmen, UNLESS that is, it makes it all the way to the other side, and then it's "promoted". Then the pawn becomes whatever piece you want it to be. In my case, the piece with the most power, the Queen! Those are the rules.
(turns back to SUNNY and the board)
Sorry, SUNNY.

SUNNY is dismayed by this lesson, seems to give up and walks off to dance. RED leans on the bar, pours LANCE a drink.

LANCE
(listlessly)
Well, one thing I am good at is following the rules...

RED
How 'bout our new special, "The Bloody Crow". This one's on the house tonight for heroes and pawns.
(beat)
Why are you here?

LANCE
I want to set things right. And I want to LIVE. If only things could have stayed the way they were..! I was almost kinda happy there at the plant. Everything seemed to play

out so well. Everyone thought I was the MAN!

The two screens play a memory scene from LANCE's days at work with his blank-faced co-workers gathering around him and laughing, patting him on the back in approval...

RED
Everyone?

LANCE
Well, yes, as a matter of fact! It was kind of amazing!

RED
And did they compliment you in unison?

The two screens play again the memory from LANCE's days at work and his blank-faced co-workers gather around him and say in unison, "Well-played, Lance!" and "You're the MAN, Lance!"...

LANCE
Well, yes, as a matter of fact they DID do that! That's kind of funny, I never noticed that until you mentioned it...

RED
And did they often come together into some kind of hand shake or huddle formation..?

On the two screens LANCE is smiling straight ahead, basking in their praise, while his co-workers gather behind him, in a mysterious handshake. He turns around slowly in the sequence and the screen fades out.

LANCE
Wait! I did catch them doing that a few times. But I didn't think much of it...

RED
(matter-of factly)
LANCE, you're living in a Bubble World at work. You need to quit.

LANCE
How did you know my name?!

RED points to his name tag and gives him a sad, sympathetic smile. He slaps his forehead, feeling stupid.

RED
Call me "RED". The reason they speak in unison sometimes is that the program models tend to loop and then synch up to each other. It's a bug in the system. They're just too lazy to fix it. And the reason they join together like that when you're not looking, is to power up. Otherwise they'd just fall down after awhile. And that wouldn't be very impressive. What is this horrific place where you toil in a world of illusion with a bunch of robots, Lance?

LANCE
I'm an IT boy at Won Corporation.

A brief cacophony of "boos", hisses and "oh, no" is heard from all three dancers. The screens show the Asian spokes-lady's face smiling again and the logo for Won Corporation. Then her broken English catch-phrase, "At Won Corporation, it game OVER!" The screens go out with a horizontal static line across both and a quick fizzle.

COCO
(approaching him a bit shyly)
Lance? I heard the IT people at Won Corporation have access to the Motherboard. And that they can get into the Ancestry files and can look up everyone's real biological mother and father. Is it true?

LANCE
Well, the files are there...Of course we're not allowed to look them up. You see according to district code number 4682-33578499-djos8, it's forbidden to-

He stops mid-sentence as he notices that all three dancers have gathered around him and are looking at him in different expressions of puzzlement, annoyance and disbelief over his penchant for obeying company rules.

LANCE
OH, yeah! Easy for YOU to say, or LOOK- like that. At ME! You're all probably FREE-spirits or, or...

COCO
(Gently to him, almost consolingly)
We're all Freebodies here, LANCE.

SUAVE
We're not exactly what you'd call "up to code", Darlin!

They all laugh at this and at LANCE in his naïveté.

LANCE
Hey! I know you think this is all really funny and I'm just some Hallucinia-hooked Bubble World chump who has a few action movie moves, but you FREE people just might not want to KNOW who your real mothers and fathers are!

Though his tone is dark and serious here, the dancers all start to ignore him and chatter softly, dismissively, even derisively amongst themselves in indistinguishable sentences about whether they'd want to know who their mother or father is first and how they imagine she/he might be.

LANCE
What I MEAN is-
(his voice raised to the point that the dancers are silenced and turn toward him)
-that if you knew...Well it might not be good news.
(becomes solemn and speaks slower, more deliberately while gazing off, remembering

something devastatingly painful)

I'm not a hero. It's true. I'm a coward. I took a look at my ancestry records one night. And I found out who I really was. Turns out, I was the man who turned in his own mother for breaking a minor code. And now, I have to live with the fact that she'll be in a detention Bubble World until the day she dies...

The three dancers all feel ashamed and look down or murmur to themselves in sympathy. COCO sidles up to him, shoos SUNNY and SUAVE away with her hand. They shrug and leave her to speak more privately with LANCE.

COCO

You know, LANCE, you were a hero tonight for ME...I really appreciate what you did, freaking the GOVERNOR out like that with your uh, dance, or pose, or well you know that thing you did...

LANCE

Wait. That was the GOVERNOR?

COCO

Well, yeah, he's a regular here.

SUAVE

Except he never pays his tab, or tips!

COCO shoos him away again.

COCO

So LANCE, all I wanna say is I really appreciate whatever it was you did back there...And well, if you want me and you to get to KNOW each other better, and well, if you ever need anything. If I can help you out, well you just let me know, OK? I have connections...

LANCE

Well, alright, um, I think I'd like
that, uh, what was your..?

COCO
Coco. That's right, like
chocolate...

She smiles, cozies up to him a bit. He smiles back weakly, takes another drink and puts his arm around her. The rest of the the dancers and even RED make catcalls and woops, mrows and other funny, sexy noises.

DAY appears stage right with a gentle spot light, as the scene enters the wee hours of the morning. NIGHT appears, stage left in her soft spot. The hands of the clock spin and DAY and NIGHT sing a verse of "Intoxicated" together. Spot out on NIGHT and DAY sings the last verse.

BLACK OUT

LANCE MEETS LULU

THE CROWN, EARLY EVENING. LULU IS STANDING OFF TO THE SIDE, BACK TO THE AUDIENCE FACING A MIRROR, FIRST CHECKING HER HAIR AND MAKE UP, THEN PANTOMIMING PULLING OUT A GUN, SHOOTING, THEN BLOWING THE SMOKE, TRYING TO BE VERY COOL. HEADLEY AND DERRIERE ARE SEATED AT A TABLE IN QUIET CONVERSATION, HE IN HIS USUAL WAITER GARB, SHE IN LULU'S RED DRESS. THEY LOOK HAPPY. LULU LOOKS OVER AT THEM AND SIGHS, LONGING FOR THE KIND OF CONNECTION THEY SHARE.

DAY sings the first verse of "Knowing Is All". LANCE strides in looking both ways, then sees LULU before she sees him. He watches her pantomime, first, then how she sighs at the loving couple DERRIERE and HEADLEY. She looks down when she notices him watching her. First, she seems a bit ashamed, then meets his gaze and smiles flirtatiously. They share a moment as DAY sings:

"How do you know at first sight, she's the One?

How does the Moon know to follow the Sun..?

Can you know with one Look, to read Minds like a Book ~

Before the Fall, They say, Knowing is All..."

LANCE pulls his gaze away from LULU and scans the rest of the room. DERRIERE (in LULU's red dress) has rubbed noses with her HEADLEY while LANCE and LULU had their moment, and exited stage left. LANCE looks again for the woman in the red dress. HEADLEY, alone now, glances nervously up at the clock, the hands move quickly to 6pm, DAY is soon leaving for NIGHT, but first DAY and NIGHT harmonize singing one last verse of "Knowing Is All":

"How do you know when you can't Want for More?

How does the Wave make its way to the Shore..?

Can you know with one Touch, when a Heart feels too Much ~

Before the Fall, They say, Knowing is All..."

They finish their song and HEADLEY's shift, waiting tables at the Crown, begins. LANCE, not seeing DERRIERE, turns back again to be face to face close to LULU. They hold each others' gaze in a kind of tango move to another table. The lights following them as the band plays a simple poignant version of "Knowing Is All". NIGHT softly sings a verse. LANCE settles into a chair and looks up at LULU adoringly. She gazes down at him, trying to be professional in her undercover role as a waitress. She slips a menu in front of him, points to it and smiles, innocently.

LULU
What'll you have?

LANCE
Surprise me.

LULU moves her face close to LANCE's as if they might kiss. LANCE closes his eyes, takes a breath and parts his lips, expecting her to... But she swiftly moves away from him. His eyes snap back open when she loudly says:

LULU
Okay! And what are we in the MOOD for this evening, Sir..?

LANCE
Lance. That's my name. And you are?

LULU
Derri-
(starts to say,

"Derriere", thinks
better of it, stops)
Miss "D". You can just call me "Miss D". Now, about that surprise you wanted-

LANCE
(takes her hand, impulsively)
Yes. I did want that. I've wanted that for a long time, Misty. What I mean is, YOU. You're a surprise. There's something about you. You're...different.

LULU
Let's not get carried away, Mr. um, "LANCE", was it?

LANCE
(looks dejected, embarrassed, then charged suddenly with new resolve)
I'm sorry, you beautiful little waitress, trapped in this hysterically overpriced restaurant, but the fact is, I NOW have exactly two days to live. And I'm not even sure how I want to spend these last precious hours of my life! Something, something deep inside me, tells me that I want to feel awake and alive like never before, if only for these last two inconsequential blinks of an eye on the face of the big picture of this monstrous masterpiece that is our apathetic, euphemistic Universe. In my meticulously miniscule, insignificant, unexamined life, I have always played by the rules. I have always acted according to code. I thought I knew every demented detail, every neurotic nuance of every ludicrous law. What I realized when I saw your face, was that I really don't know a THING, you misty little waitress,

you! You vision of vitality in this gaudy little gilded cage! But I WANT to know. I want to know it all, Misty! Just for these next 48 hours I want to know life, to own my fate, I want to BE somebody!
(takes a breath and seems a bit surprised by his own audacity)
And I think YOU can help me.

LULU
(eyes wide)
OK...So NOT the special.

BLACKOUT

LANCE & LULU FALL IN LOVE

NIGHT and DAY sing, "Surprise Me", stage right under spots:

"You, surprise me, Your eyes invite me, Your lips entice me... To another world outside my window

Unexpected, Seldom selected I'll stand corrected If I know you're right beside me ~ You surprise me, You do.

Here I thought I'd seen it all before Then you showed me, so much more... There was nothing new under the sun, Then one dark night A star showed me some one...

You challenge me, Enchant and scare me, Inspire and dare me, to a world of danger where you're no stranger... You surprise me, You do."

Meanwhile, the clock above shows time passing and a gentler light shows LANCE and LULU (on the side stage left, decorated now as a small artsy attic, LULU's room above The Font) Lights fade in and out on them for a kind of montage effect, as NIGHT and DAY sing. Each little mini-scene shows them having fun talking, her showing him funny pictures of stick figures eating pills and dying, of the CROW and GOVERNOR drawn crudely. LULU educates LANCE about “The System”. Uses a simple illustration of the president of Won Corporation in his red porkpie hat and the words “President of Won Corporation” , then lifts the clear film layer of the red hat, red gloves and the words “President of Won Corporation”, to reveal the image of the man now in THE CROW's distinctive

dress of black leather flight cap and black gloves with claws, the words “President of Won Corporation” now covered by a white tag under the film on which is written boldly, "THE CROW of The System". This is shown in close-up on the double screens above. She shows him some yo-yo tricks, but puts her fingers to her lips to let him know this is secret, and puts the yo-yo carefully away in a safe place (under her mattress) this being her secret weapon used to bust her out of the Children's Facility. Him smiling and admiring her for her yo-yoing skills and then a close-up of him knitting his brow and scratching his chin. Trying to remember why the yo-yo tricks seem so familiar. He remembers with an eye-widening moment, then blinks quickly, shakes his head as if to dismiss this thought, as her smiling face comes close to his, causing him to smile brightly and look at her affectionately. They play chess, she shows him each piece. He demonstrates his methods of martial arts and fencing, stabbing her with the practice sword once. She fakes death, melodramatically and falls. He catches her in his arms. They draw near, but he moves away this time.

Incorporated are scenes above, on the two screens of them mocking and racing around the robots in his bubble world at work, then on a steampunk roller-coaster that hurls them into a fake space in which they fly off the rails into the night sky. Then the stars and darkness peel down (bubble world style) and they laugh, and step out of the car, into the daylight, as the song ends with a sunrise on the screens and small spot shared by DAY and NIGHT harmonizing the last notes together, smiling.

FADE OUT

LANCE MEETS W COCO/ LULU SPIES ON HIM

LIGHTS UP SOFTLY ON THE SMALL STAGE TO SHOW AN ARTY COFFEE SHOP WITH A FEW SMALL TABLES, LANCE AND COCO SEATED TOGETHER IN THE CENTER. AT EITHER SIDE OF THEM IS A TABLE WITH ROBOTIC-LOOKING PEOPLE MOVING STIFFLY, PRETENDING TO DRINK COFFEE. THE GOVERNOR IS ALSO SEATED BETWEEN TWO FEMALE ROBOTS, HIS ARMS AROUND THEM WHISPERING TO THEM AND SMILING LASCIVIOUSLY. ONE OF THE ROBOTS LOOKS SUSPICIOUSLY LIKE LULU WITH SOME OF HER BLOND HAIR PEEKING OUT FROM UNDER HER BRUNETTE WIG. LANCE LOOKS A BIT NERVOUS AND CREEPED OUT. THE SIGN ABOVE AND ON THE SCREENS READS. "CHESTNUT TREE CAFE. ALL CUSTOMERS SUBJECT TO SEARCH AND ENHANCED INTERROGATION. NO FREEBODIES ALLOWED. ENJOY YOUR JAVA!"

LANCE
Um, what is this place, COCO?

COCO
One of my favorite little spots to get a cup of coffee, "The Chestnut Tree"

LANCE
Yeah, I can read! But is this place REAL? Or is it one of those, um "Bubble Worlds"?

COCO
Ah, LANCE, you're getting good. Kinda funny how even the GOVERNOR over there doesn't seem to notice he's hitting on two Bim-bots, with artificial everythings!

LANCE glances over, but isn't too interested. It becomes more pronounced and then clear to the audience, that the one on the right is LULU by the way she's acting, as opposed to the mechanical movements of the other "Bim-bot" as LULU tries to listen in on the conversation LANCE is having with COCO. She keeps trying to lean in closer to them, while acting engaged with the GOVERNOR and the other Bim-bot.

COCO
(watching THE GOVERNOR as if studying an insect from afar)
Or actually he probably doesn't care whether they're real or not. Most men don't.
(wrinkles her pretty nose and winces a bit, then composes herself, turns back to LANCE)
So. The program research studies I've conducted over the last 3 years-

LANCE
(interrupting her)
Wait. You conducted...STUDIES?

COCO

(looking disappointed and even offended)
Well, come on now, LANCE. You didn't think I was just a dancer, did you?

LANCE
OK, I'm sorry...Go on.

COCO
My studies show a high degree of communication static in this area, since so many surveillance officers jump onto this wave-length, to watch the action at any time of day or night. Let's face it. They have horrible, boring jobs. This is how they get their kicks.
(She shrugs, he nods)
All it usually takes, is some kind of overture made by a person, that could be seen as even mildly stimulating by the surveillance officers. Then the circuits are completely jammed and suddenly what we say and do are unheard and invisible.

LANCE
Great! Cuz I have to talk to you about something really...Sensitive.

COCO
Wait, LANCE. I wanna talk to you too. But first, you make the move on me and then we wait for the static sound to kick in. Then we know we won't be heard. Got it?

LANCE
Uh, yeah, but what's "the move"?

COCO
Come on, LANCE-
(raises her eyebrows and winks at him, just as LULU gets a glimpse of the two)
You got this, right?

He winks back at her, makes a funny animal growl/meow sound, trying his best to be convincing and shyly reaches a hand toward her knee under the table. She responds in an exaggerated way, coyly yet seductively toward him. Then looks up and to the sides and listens. Hearing nothing she leans in closer to him...

COCO
More, Lance MORE!

He seems to panic a bit, then looks focused and in thought.

COCO
Surprise me!

LANCE reaches over to COCO, takes her commandingly and buries his face in her neck, dramatically. A loud, hissing sound of static ensues. LULU is livid, stands up and marches off. LANCE and COCO don't notice this and THE GOVERNOR just shrugs and lavishes attention on his Bim-bot. COCO pulls away, smiles triumphantly and puts a hand up to hi-five LANCE. The static sound dims to a low hum.

COCO
Yes! We DID it, LANCE. Now. We have between 4 and 6 minutes in private while the circuits are jammed. We're off line. So what did you want to ask me?

LANCE
Well, first, I want to ask you about Misty. You see, COCO, I think I'm in love with her...

COCO
Miss "D"? Hangs around The Crown? You mean HER?

LANCE
Well, that IS where I met her.

COCO
Ok, that is not good.

LANCE
Why not good?

COCO
Why? Well, to start with, she's got a boyfriend. She and HEADLEY have been together for awhile. And it's a beautiful thing, those two...
(smiles and looks off dreamily)

LANCE looks confused and upset. Crosses his arms, angrily.

COCO
And well, you know how she passes out all the time, at inopportune moments and well that can be problematic...Then there's the whole annoying body language fluency. Yeah, I bet it's fun at parties, but come ON. I mean people get tired of being analyzed like that all the time, told what they really meant when they said what they did, that their fingertips are arguing with their punctuation, that their clothes would look better on HER! I mean no one really wants to be READ like that!

LANCE
(too distracted by his anger to pay attention to what COCO's saying, but wanting to move on)
RED! What about RED?

COCO
OH, now you're interested in RED?
(raises an eyebrow, getting the wrong idea)
Well, "Miss Red", as her most ardent admirer calls her, only has eyes for one man. And he's dark and mysterious and well, pretty creepy actually.

LANCE
Hmm, sounds like my boss at the plant...

COCO

Whenever anyone asks her what she sees in him, she just kinda smiles this crazy smile of hers and says something like-

The lights dim on the scene except for a small low spot on COCO's face and the two screens fade up to show RED's face up close rhapsodizing her feelings for THE CROW. AS RED's voice takes over, Coco is still mouthing the words but making sarcastic, mocking, exasperated faces.

RED
I know none of you like him, but we have this uncanny connection. It's almost as if we've created something together just the two of us, without even trying, without even being aware of it. Like a whole other life...
(takes a pause to dream, COCO rolls her eyes)
Oh, I know what you're thinking. He's mysterious. And I agree. But through his core is something pure, something true. I can't imagine him ever telling a lie.

LANCE
Well, that IS something...

COCO
The guy is pure EVIL, LANCE. TRUE evil. Honestly, those two keep it simple. She doesn't even play chess with him. Just checkers. And she always lets him win.

LANCE
She cares about this guy, huh? Sounds like she protects him, too.

COCO
Thing is, the other dancers and I think he could be dangerous. RED gives some great advice, but she isn't always so good at following it herself.
(looks into the distance concerned by this

thought)

LANCE
Hey, COCO, you said you had connections.

COCO
I sure do, Sugar! Not only am I a dancer at The Font and a crypto-hacker scientist on the side, but I work part-time at the Crown as their Maitre 'd-slash-coat check girl!
(smiles proudly)

LANCE
Ok, well, I was wondering if you might be able to get your hands on any of the super-strong relaxation pills THE GOVERNOR had in his coat pocket the other night...

COCO
Uh, you mean THESE?
(pulls a bottle of pills out of her bag and gives them to LANCE)

LANCE
Yes! Thanks, COCO. You just might have saved a life today.

COCO
LANCE, don't tell me you have Lifemares too!

LANCE
Um, no COCO, something a little more terminal than that. But with these, I just might be able to help a few more people sleep at night...

The static sound builds again. COCO and LANCE both hear it and react, annoyed by it.

COCO
They're gettin' us back online, LANCE. That's what it means.
(gets a mischievous look

on her face and moves
closer to him)
Hey, wanna jam 'em up again..?

Static gets louder, then ends abruptly ~

BLACK OUT

LULU & RED, LANCE & RED, LULU & LANCE FALLING OUT

THE FONT, IN FULL SWING, MUSIC AND DANCING, THE GOVERNOR IS AT ONE END, WATCHING SUAVE AND SUNNY DANCE. RED IS MIXING UP SOME OF THE HOUSE SPECIALTY. COCO CONTEMPLATES THE CHESS BOARD BETWEEN DANCE MOVES.

LULU enters stage left, obviously livid, takes a seat at the bar, looks up dramatically in dismay and calls out ~

LULU
Red!

RED
(walks over calmly)
What.

LULU
Why me?

RED
Princess, you know the answer to that first word is really just the second word. Why YOU? Because of YOU, because you're the one who made the decisions you've made, which brought you to where you ARE. You're the only one who can answer that question.

RED leans over the the chess board, makes a move and takes a piece from her opponent, SUNNY.

RED
Check.

SUNNY shakes her head in disbelief and dismay and dances off.

LULU

RED? Just this once. Can you be more like some kind of mom to me? Or maybe just a friend, and less of a linguist or mathematician or, or philosophy professor?

RED
I want to help you, Honey, I do. But if I did all the thinking for you, you'd never be doing any of it on your own. You know that.

LULU
And this is why I wish I knew who my real DAD was. He'd be understanding-

Lights down on the scene except for a small spot on LULU as a gentle spot goes up on stage to the left, the office of THE CROW, where he's wearing his black leather flight cap now, sitting atop his desk, gazing ahead with a look of yearning. The band begins to play a delicate, but building in intensity version of "Knowing Is All", starting with violin, acoustic guitar and accordion, building with bass, drums and piano, as the scene builds in intensity.

THE CROW
She'd be ruthless!
(He's smiles in delight)

LULU
He'd be patient and kind-

THE CROW
Impetuous and cruel!

LULU
Noble and dedicated~

THE CROW
Notorious and devious!

LULU & THE CROW
But above ALL...Passionate!

The music at its height ends with a flourish in perfect time with these words. The two freeze a moment and smile, looking forward. Then they both take out their respective yo-yos and do the same trick, "Rock the Baby", in perfect synch with

each other. Spot goes out on THE CROW. Lights up on the bar again.

LULU
RED, Have you ever felt betrayed by some one you thought you might LOVE?!
(in frustration anger, then sad desperation)

The violin begins a slow, poignant version of "Surprise Me", then joined quietly by guitar and a few bass notes.

Have you ever felt you really knew someone. Some one sweet, almost innocent, really...
(rhapsodizing dreamily, as she looks off into the distance, a soft spot light opens on her, as the rest of the lights on the bar dim)
Some one unexpectedly pure of heart-

At this point, RED becomes dreamy too. The action of all the others at the bar freezes. A small, soft spot light swells gently to show RED's face smiling, lost in her own thoughts.

LULU
-The kind of person who's misunderstood by others, because they're different, special. Some one who's smart and funny, silly at times, serious at others...

RED shakes herself out of her own dream and redirects her attention to LULU's story. The spot fades on her.

LULU
A guy who sweeps you off your feet, and tells you he's got two days to live, and he wants YOU to show him how!

As th piano and drums gently join in the slower version of "Surprise me", building with LULU's excitement, the whole band stops abruptly.

RED

Wait. WHAT?

SUNNY
Hmf! Sounds like a good line to me, little L. Was he handsome too? I bet he was HANDSOME!

RED
(turning away from SUNNY back to LULU, trying to be more sympathetic)
LULU, Don't get trapped in a pattern. Don't be part of anyone else's code. Look for the alternate move. From time to time, pick up the unlikely piece, the one that's a little different. the one that doesn't move in a straight line...the non-linear lends a leap!
(Becomes almost giddy with her own alliterations)

LULU
You're talking about the chessboard, aren't you, RED. The only piece that doesn't move in a straight line is the knight...

LULU reaches over and picks up RED's knight. Same small spot light comes up on the face of NIGHT, leaning against the bar drinking. She perks up at this word, smiles as if she's been called. Spot now on DAY too, standing calmly at the doorway, leaning on his cane, checking his pocket watch, looks up, is amused by this, but wags a finger at her, shakes his head no. NIGHT shrugs. Spots out on them both again.

RED smiles, traces the letter "L" in the air with her hand, in a sweeping gesture, like a conductor with a symphony.

LULU
I remember...In an "L" shape. It's the only piece on the board that can almost curve.

RED
That's right, LULU. The only move that can seem to go around and even THROUGH the other pieces. The "L"

move will take you by surprise, coming into play when you least expect it. You've got to be ready for it. And maybe even more important than being ready for the moment you feel it coming at you...Is knowing when to pick up your own "L" and USE it. That "L" can get you in and out of situations nothing else can. But LULU-

(hesitates thoughtfully here, almost like she doesn't want to continue)

Love is the most powerful force of all. Careful what your love. For what you love is what you will be drawn to. And what you are drawn to, you will synchronize with; you will resonate with, whether you realize it, or not. When you have given yourself so completely, that you feel with the greatest exultation, absolute annihilation, you will reach the realization, and you will know...Love.

(beat)

Choose wisely, Princess.

LULU

(looks up at the big clock with a start, suddenly inspired)

I'm going to go find that man! He only has a few hours left to live. And we've got a lot of learning, a lot of living and a lot of loving to do!

LULU picks herself up and strides, exiting stage left. The full band strikes up an enthusiastic last phrase of "Surprise Me" as LULU strides off, then finishes.

RED

(leaning back to the chessboard and looking back at SUNNY who's standing arms akimbo staring as LULU leaves)

Check!

SUNNY
And MATE. SHE's useless, huh?

COCO and SUAVE join RED and SUNNY at the left side of the bar in a semi-circle kind of huddle. An upbeat, electro-swing version of "How to Save the World" begins with mechanical percussion, accordion and piano.

RED
OK, everyone, we need more intel on this IT boy working for THE CROW. Who's got what?

The dancers all start to speak at the same time, one motioning for the other to be quiet, in a kind of slapstick exercise in futility in communication, crescendoing to a buzz of babble. HEADLEY enters with DERRIERE, announcing loudly:

HEADLEY
Everybody, P-P-pipe the H-E double hocky-sticks down! My little DERRIERE and I are h-h-here with some s-s-secrets!

The music and the whole room goes quiet and RED looks up and slaps her forehead, while the dancers all smile sweetly at the pair and sigh.

Lights out on the bar scene. Spot up on NIGHT, stage left, then DAY, stage right, as everyone at the bar freezes mid-motion. The band plays a bit of "The Mystery of You" softly as DAY and NIGHT tell the audience to order another drink during a short intermission and discuss what secrets lie ahead for "The Eccentrics".

BLACKOUT ~
INTERMISSION

THE CROW CALLS FOR LANCE AGAIN

WON CORPORATION, THE CROW'S OFFICE, BEHIND THE DESK, SITS THE CROW, AS PRESIDENT OF WON CORPORATION, PORKPIE HAT AND RED GLOVES. IN THE CHAIR ACROSS FROM THE DESK, SITS LANCE.

THE CROW

You know why you're here, LANCE.
(musing deliciously to himself, stands up and does a little spin)

LANCE
I'm here to set things right!

THE CROW
(raising his eyebrows, impressed with LANCE's apparent resolve)
Yes, my boy! Soon, perhaps to become a MAN. You've been on the inside for over two days now...And in that time you've infiltrated “The Free Association"...

LANCE
That is correct, sir.

THE CROW
(shuffles a few papers on his desk)
And I must say your reports here of said infiltrations have been as hysterically meticulous as expected! Why you've got reams of information here on craft cocktailing, pole-dancing, chess moves, from castling to Fool's Mate...Ah, but nothing on CHECKERS...
(looks a bit disappointed by this, scowls then checks himself, and shakes it off, remembering that he's incognito, known only as "Mr. Ekshun" at The Font)
And NOTHING reporting the destruction of this annoying Freebody they call "LuLu Paloma"!

LANCE
(straightens up to address the issue)
Why, yes, Sir. That is correct. And well, it might help if I had just a

little more information on her
or... her friends. So I might
entrap her!

THE CROW
Ah, but previous reports indicate
her to be a bit of a loner, an
eccentric perhaps...
(thinks to himself, then
changes his tone to be
dismissive, even
vitriolic)
The wench is a societal REJECT,
some kind of FREAK, an aberration!
And that, my boy is at the core of
just what is so wrong with her, why
in fact she must be ended.
(excited, leaps out from
behind his desk, spot
following him)
What society needs now is
consistency! And consistency is
attained through standardization,
and standardization through
obedience to authority. And
obedience, through carefully
orchestrated, imposed punishments,
set forth by well, by ME!
(tickled now by his own
logic)
Don't you see? Society NEEDS me!
And men like me! Because most men
are weak, helpless, indecisive,
lost...

DAY standing, leaning on his cane, stage right, begins to tap-dance, a bit, building almost as if to try to drown out THE CROW's evil proclamation. The band begins to join him enthusiastically with the music for "What's It Like to be You"

THE CROW
(turning toward DAY)
Hey, could you stop that for a
minute?
(turns to the audience,
whispers loudly)
I think I need to make these kinds
of speeches at NIGHT..!

DAY and the band reluctantly cease. The hands of the clock move quickly to 6pm. NIGHT enters, smiling sweetly as if she has heard her name called or complimented. She looks at the scene, realizes that the CROW is up to no good, scratches her head, looks angry and looks over at DAY, now quietly checking his pocket watch to double-check the time. She opens her palms toward DAY and shrugs to him as if to say, "Is this right?" He scowls. He does not approve.

THE CROW
(back to LANCE)
Society NEEDS me. Some one smarter, more powerful to make decisions for them, so they don't have to do things like....THINK.
(smiles sardonically)
They want- no, they NEED- to give their lives to me. And I'm here to TAKE them...
(softening after his speech and turning his attention more specifically back to LANCE)
LANCE, it seems I've grown quite, uh, perhaps "fond" is the word. Yes, FOND of you. So I'll share with you, a bit of advice. And this I promise, will change your LIFE.
(leaning in to whisper loudly to the audience again)
Even if there IS just 3 hours, six minutes and thirty five seconds left of it!
(turning back to LANCE dramatically)
LANCE. Find what you love, and kill it. All vulnerability, all weakness, must be eradicated. For only that which you truly LOVE has the power to destroy you. Where you give your love, you give your power. During my basic training in the “MIC”-

NIGHT leans forward a bit to the audience and looks to DAY, questioning as she says:

NIGHT
Military..?

DAY
(explaining to her and the audience)
Industrial.

NIGHT
Complex?

DAY nods yes, sadly.

THE CROW
My favorite drill of all was cleverly created by the most insightfully insidious sergeant-

DAY
-who later became Governor of all the Land!
(with a wink, as a knowing aside to the audience)

The screens above open to show a big man (the Governor) in full military attire, then his dark green uniform fades into a bright green suit and quickly, oddly pulsing into a bright blue colored suit, as he sands still, domineering and proud.

THE CROW
A standardized, System-approved test, an exercise, was given to every soldier. The soldier would write a list of the 3 most tender, joyous, treasured of his boyhood possessions. From this, he chose his most precious. He was commanded to destroy this, be it a favorite book, a family heirloom, a keepsake from his mother with sentimental significance, a valuable piece of art, perhaps a painting or a statue, or just an old yellowed crayon drawing that'd spent sunny days on the family fridge. My dearest childhood friend, "Johnny", lived next door to me. For

awhile...
(stares off frozen into the distance until LANCE cuts in)

LANCE
So...He... moved away?

THE CROW
(with an evil smile)
That's one way of looking at it.
(turning darkly serious)
LANCE, where your love lies, there is your greatest weakness. And all weakness must be destroyed. For where there is weakness, there cannot be strength!

LANCE
(with new resolve)
Mr. E., I believe NOW I can fulfill my mission!

THE CROW
I knew you COULD.

LANCE
You've helped me to see things more clearly.

THE CROW
Of course I have.

LANCE
And I think I'm going to enjoy this exploding-briefcase assassin-business quite a bit!

THE CROW
Bravo!

LANCE
And so, I'd like to ask you a small favor.

THE CROW
Anything!

LANCE

Well, as you know my biological mother was put into a Correctional Facility some years ago~

THE CROW
-and by your own suggestion to the authorities, I understand!
(smiling proudly)

LANCE
(winces slightly to himself, hiding it from THE CROW)
That is correct, Sir. And Mr. E, if what you say is true and if one must indeed kill what one loves, well then I know NOW that I must destroy once and for all this woman who still holds sway over my emotions, weakening me. Is there a way, she can be released from the Correctional Facility so that I may have at her?

THE CROW
Ah! LANCE my boy, if I didn't know better, I would swear that you were my own son, fruit of my loins, my own blood coursing through your veins...
(Suddenly dropping his intensity to a casual tone)
-but since I've already seen a few of the Ancestry Records, I know we're not related, by DNA.
(shrugs)
I like the way you think, though! You're a lucky guy, Mr. Lance LeBlanc.

LANCE
That's one way of looking at it, Mr. E.

THE CROW
Because you see, THE GOVERNOR just happens to be a close, personal friend of mine. You remember him,

don't you, LANCE? I believe you even voted for him...Correct?

LANCE
Ah, well, granted both of the candidates seemed identical, except for the green suit of the one and the blue suit of the other.

The screens open on either side, one showing THE GOVERNOR addressing a sea of swarming people, all in sepia tone, save for his green suit, the other screen showing the same scene with the same man, but in a blue suit. Iris out on both.

THE CROW
And what a difference that IS! I mean saying green is the same as blue is like comparing apples to oranges, ice cream to chicken soup, an elephant to a donkey!

LANCE
Well, apples and oranges are both fruit. When ice cream melts, it turns to soup. And elephants and donkeys can both be beasts of burden.

THE CROW
-and I say, thank goodness our beast in blue won the election! Though of course, it took plenty of green...
(winks to the audience)

LANCE
So THE GOVERNOR has the flash key to the Correctional Facilities, Mr. E?

THE CROW
Well, not in his coat pockets, my boy! I believe in fact, that the crafty fellow keeps them in his shoes, of all places, which he wears at all times. And he isn't even fond of bowling...A pity, really. Sport of kings, they say.

THE CROW gets distracted here, pulls out his silver yo-yo and lets it slide up & down its string a few times...

THE CROW
OH, and he never sleeps, the man!

LANCE
Never? How? Why?

THE CROW
Funny little quirk of his. Turns out THE GOVERNOR suffers from LIFEmares.

LANCE
You mean his don't just happen at night?

THE CROW
Well, in certain rare cases...THE GOVERNOR has become weak, LANCE. In fact nearly despicably so...
(scowls and nearly growls to the audience, threatens to rip open his shirt again, waits for the audience to react positively or negatively to this)

DAY on one side, holds up an elegantly typed sign that reads. "Applause to see Mechanical Heart". NIGHT holds up a sign that reads, "Boo & Hiss to see him yo-yo instead". He decides which he'll do according to the response, then turns back to LANCE.

THE CROW
The GOVERNOR's Lifemares seem to be brought on and sustained by some residual "conscience". I've heard these annoying consciences can also cause headaches and stomach upset. Apparently THE GOVERNOR gets both whenever he remembers that he sentenced his biological sister to The Asylum Facility. She had it coming! Her and her tedious habit of "body language fluency"! Always telling people more than they want

to know. More than they SHOULD know...

LANCE
What happened to her?

THE CROW
The wench? A few years ago, she escaped the Facility by some clever physical word-play...Some kind of linguistic gymnastics that our military is still trying to decipher.

The two screens open again to show in slightly fast motion, a scene of DERRIERE, pointing at a guard, mocking his posture, then putting her thumbs to her ears on either side, spreading her fingers wide and wiggling them, while sticking her tongue out. She does a summer salt, a jumping jack and stands on her head. The guard is unnerved, camera zooms close up on his face as he's trying to tear out his hair. Camera pulling back slowly reveals that he is standing, looking terrified now only in a pair of boxer shorts, steam escaping his ears. He turns and runs in fright. Screens go static, then white line zips out to black.

LANCE
And now..?

THE CROW
No, our scientists have still not figured out what kind of strange and dangerous language she was speaking with her body to confuse our security bots.

LANCE
No, I mean what happened to the, uh, WENCH?

THE CROW
Oh, HER...Who knows. She probably lives in the streets somewhere like a disgusting animal.
(brightens with an enticing new thought)
Say, would you like to destroy her as well? This is getting fun, now isn't it! Let's add her to our

list. Why not?

LANCE
(enthusiastically, standing up)
Why NOT!

They freeze. The band plays a full, electro-swing, slightly twisted version of the chorus of "How to Save the World".

BLACK OUT

LANCE CONFIDES IN RED/LULU'S & LANCE'S IDENTITIES REVEALED

NIGHT AT THE FONT

Spot on NIGHT, stage left as she sings an evocative verse of "How to Save the World". Spot out on her. Lights up at the bar where RED is in concentrated discussion with the three dancers. HEADLEY & DERRIERE in their own private conference at the end of the bar. LANCE walks in. RED and the dancers abruptly stop their chatting, watch him closely and then RED motions for the dancers to leave her alone with him.

RED
What'll you have, Hero-Pawn?

LANCE solemnly takes the bottle of super-relaxation pills out of his jacket and places them on the bar, as if to contemplate them easier.

LANCE
(resolutely, distracted by the gravity of his thoughts)
I think I'll have to put a certain narcoleptic, body-language reading Freebody into a coma-like sleep with these horrible Won Corporation pills, to satisfy the blood-lust of Mr. Elegy, my boss.

RED
(suddenly very excited)
Wait. LANCE. You're the ONE, aren't you?

LANCE
The one with 42 minutes and 26 seconds left to live? The one who just met the woman of his dreams, a sweet and innocent rose who deserves to be with a real man, and not some kind of "It-boy" following rules and manuals, living his life working in a Bubble World, getting recruited by his boss to kill a bunch of innocent people? THAT one, RED???

RED
(lifts her eyebrows at all this info)
OK, so not only are you the super-agent hired by THE CROW to kill LULU, but you're the guy LULU's in LOVE with!

LANCE, surprised by this statement, cocks his head to one side, squinting, jumps off his stool to get some distance and silently raises a finger to RED. She exhales impatiently, arms akimbo, lowers her chin and levels her gaze at LANCE.

RED
You're a lucky guy, LANCE LEBLANC. But why do you want to put my little DERRIERE to sleep? If you ask me, she could really use some get-up and go!

LANCE takes this the wrong way and is shocked.

LANCE
MAdam!

LULU strides in.

RED
LULU!

LULU
LANCE!

LANCE
Misty!

RED
Who?

LULU
Sorry!

LANCE
LULU?

LULU
LANCE!

RED crosses her arms, understanding it all now, nods and smiles as LULU runs to the arms of LANCE. They embrace, smile at each other, take a couple's dance pose and spin with joy, sighing together. The band plays a few bars of "How to Save the World"as they dance together.

THE CROW, in black leather cap, enters quietly, stage left, stops at the touching love scene before him, strokes his chin and nods to himself. No one sees him. He looks up at the clock who's hands spin wildly then stop again. Then makes a hasty exit stage left. A loud ring is heard like an old fashioned telephone. LANCE pantomimes "just a minute" to LULU, and pulls out of one of his pockets an old-timey phone, its curly cord connected to a modern smart phone.

LANCE
Uh, yes Sir! In exactly seven minutes at...
(slowing down here as if he isn't familiar with the location)
"The Font", Sir? Well, yes I've HEARD of it. Not in a very good neighborhood, though, Sir, is it? Are you sure it's uh, safe?

The dancers hear this and make angry faces/gestures toward him. He shrugs, puts his hand up to keep them quiet. RED rolls her eyes, gets closer to figure out what's happening.

LANCE
I'll be here, uh, THERE, Sir!
(puts phone away, spins to face the others)
This is it, everyone. This is how I die. RED, I want you all out of here in 5 minutes, in case things

get out of hand. I don't want any
of you getting hurt. If I'm going
to die of sudden death poisoning in
15 minutes and 24 seconds, I'm
taking THE CROW with me.

The band strikes up a chorus of "How to Save the World" as LANCE draws his sword with a flourish, slices through a candle on top of the bar, nods to RED to lift off the top. She does, looks a bit impressed, then shakes her head slowly.

HEADLEY and DERRIERE whisper silently to each other, then discreetly exit stage right. No one else on stage notices them leave. A lonely sounding guitar softly plays a phrase of "How to Save the World" as RED and LANCE talk, then stops.

RED
LANCE. Maybe we can help you.

LANCE
How? A chess match to the death?

SUNNY
(sadly, thoughtfully)
I heard he doesn't play chess.

COCO, SUAVE & RED all pull back a little in a bit of shock and disapproval, and say together:

COCO, SUAVE & RED
Ooooh...

LANCE
Well, he's a pretty darn good
swordsman!

COCO
And I hear he's an even better
martial artist!

SUAVE
(raising his eyebrows and
leaning over to indicate
he sees the paperback
book peaking out of
LANCE's back pocket)
They say he's some kind of "expert"
at "Chasing Tail" too...
(rolls his eyes)

LANCE moves quickly, defensively away from SUAVE. The lonesome guitar again plays "How to Save the World" softly under the dialogue between LANCE and RED.

LANCE
I know you all think I'm pretty pathetic. And I know the one you call THE CROW is one dangerous man.

RED
LANCE, look for what connects us to each other, not what separates us. Sometimes the most valuable information is gained by watching life moving, from one logical position to the next. We all leave our mark on this world.

LANCE
RED, this isn't the time to be philosophical! Now is the time for action!

RED
Yes, LANCE. But you aren't listening to me. It's possible that THE CROW, something he said, or something he did, can tell us how we can overcome this. We all share something of ourselves, whether we know it or not. Even whether we WANT to, or not. Our own body-language fluent DERRIERE, understands so much of a person with just a glance. We can all know so much about each other, if we only knew where to look and how to listen. At the right moment, in the right way. Each one of us is so different, yet we're all connected. Every adult citizen is required to surrender their biological potentiality to the Motherboard...Some of us may be connected to each other closer than we'd even LIKE to be. Look for the connections. What exactly did THE CROW tell you about the antidote?

Maybe there is some kind of connection...

LANCE
Well..When I asked him why he'd taken the poison with me, he said he was immune to it! That he was somehow genetically flawed that way, among OTHER things...

RED
Wait. He mentioned genetics? And do you know who THE CROW might be related to, LANCE? You've seen the ancestry records!

LANCE
Well, I haven't read all of the records. Nobody has. But yes, I have noticed something. Well, some ONE who must be related closely to THE CROW.

The screens above fizz on as the lights at the bar dim. The piano and bass play "Knowing Is All" as the screen on the left shows THE CROW yo-yoing in front of his desk, while LANCE sits across from him, watching. The screen on the right shows LULU in her room, yo-yoing for LANCE who watches her lovingly. LANCE looks down sharply, struck again by the terrible truth, concluded in his memory of the two scenes, realizing that LULU is the daughter of THE CROW. The music stops. The screens fizz off, lights up on the bar.

RED
(watching him intently, then leaning forward passionately)
There IS a connection! And you know it, don't you, LANCE! What exactly did THE CROW say when you asked him about the antidote?

LANCE
He said that the antidote was on the tip of his tongue, that it would spring forth from his mouth as soon as...

RED

(spits to one side)
Of course! Spiteful scorn is his elixir of life!

LANCE
And YOUR elixir of life seems to be your love of alliteration!

RED
LANCE, THE CROW may seem mysterious, but he's already answered your question. He told you the Truth. You just weren't listening. Instead, you were thinking about how you could foil him. How you might beat him at his own game...

LANCE
And that's just it! He's written the rules to every game, making it just about impossible to beat him!

RED
And yet you still try...
(shakes her head sadly)
THE CROW writes the rules to HIS games, hoping you'll agree to play them! And you keep doing it. LANCE, you need to surprise him. You need to surprise yourSELF.

The band plays a few bars of "How to Save the World".

L SAVES WORLD/PEOPLE DIE

THE FONT

The CROW enters stage left, wearing his porkpie hat, but instead of his red gloves, the distinctly sinister black, clawed gloves of THE CROW. By his side is a guard, wearing full riot-gear, and holding in one hand a silver briefcase. The dancers all are surprised by his appearance, recognizing him immediately as "Mr. Ekshun", but RED looks at him as just another customer, seems not to notice who he is. The dancers are all afraid and hiding half-way behind the bar and the pole. THE CROW does not even seem to notice them. LANCE spins

from the bar and his conversation to face THE CROW, his sword at his side.

THE CROW
LANCE, where is LULU? Have you completed your mission? Are you ready to take what is yours?

LANCE
I don't know where LULU is, CROW. But I do know that I'm in love with her.

THE CROW
(dismissing this with a wave of his hand)
OK, fine, but is she DEAD? And why are you calling me that?
(squinting suspiciously)

LANCE
No, CROW, in fact LULU is the most alive person I've ever met! And that is why I love her.

THE CROW
What do you know, you Bubble World Buffoon?

He draws his sword and makes a flourish with it in the air. LANCE draws his up and the two men clash swords, boldly, LANCE much more confident now, THE CROW just as strong. The band begins an exuberant version of "Knowing Is All" as they fence.

LANCE
I know only two things, CROW! That I'm not afraid to end your miserable life, and that for once in my life, I'm not afraid to die!

More intense clashing of swords. The band quickly transitions into a vigorous verse of "Intoxicated",as the CROW deflects LANCE's advances, and he explains:

THE CROW
OH, but you've been programmed to fear death, LANCE. You've all been programmed that way. The

Motherboard formulated you. The System encoded you. The Children's facility and Won Corporation conditioned you. Submit to your specifications, fulfill your fate, act according to your code and you can live like a KING! I carry the antidote with me now. You're so close. Game over!

LANCE

You see, CROW, the Motherboard may have chosen my Ancestry for me, but I've decided to do my own encoding now! I'm tired of your games, so I think I'll change those as well! To live like a King who can hardly move at all in any direction, for fear of breaking the rules? That's no life for me!

LANCE pulls his paperback edition of "Chasing Tail" out of his back pocket, and dramatically rips it in half, tosses it onto the ground downstage and turns his head to spit on it. THE CROW is incensed by this action, intakes as if to spit to the other side, then lifts an eyebrow slyly and stops, turns his head back to LANCE, who lunges forward, boldly at him with his sword. THE CROW defends himself deftly.

LANCE and THE CROW cross swords, draw together close, eye to eye. The music stops except for a lightly held single high note by the violin and an anticipatory note plucked on the bass. THE CROW is nearly spitting at him, as he vehemently retorts:

THE CROW

Whether you like your code or not, you will act accordingly! You've been chosen and trained for this. Against me, you are nothing! I am the great creator. I am the game master! I see you growing weary, LANCE. You are weak!

LANCE is panting in exhaustion now, wipes the spit from THE CROW out of his eye, pauses, then seems to get an idea.

LULU runs into the bar, stage left with her briefcase in hand. The guitar plays the first line of "Knowing Is All".

LANCE sees LULU and is distracted. THE CROW's blade catches LANCE's side and he feels the sting of it slicing his flesh through his coat. He leans forward. A groan of pain escapes him.

LANCE
LULU, no! Why are you here?

LULU
I'm here to set things right!

THE CROW
Seems your LOVE has made you weak, LANCE. What a pity! How pathetic of you!

LANCE is bent over in pain now. LULU steps in front of him to face THE CROW who cocks his head as if amused, draws his sword back to skewer the two of them with a single thrust. LULU opens her briefcase toward THE CROW and turns her head to the side, bracing herself. A long-stemmed rose springs upright from inside the silver briefcase.

THE CROW
Ah, ah, AH...
(holds one gloved hand under his nose, then lets loose what sounds like a muffled sob)

Tears stream down the face of THE CROW. The three dancers are intrigued and cautiously come a bit closer. LULU leans in to watch him. He pulls himself together, wiping the tears from his eyes. RED suddenly recognizes him and starts toward him.

RED
Mr. Ekshun!

THE CROW
I...Miss RED...YOU!

RED
(bitterly, about to cry)
And I, YOU!

THE CROW
I didn't want you to see me like this...
(crumbles first, seems a

bit saddened, then snaps
back with conviction)
...But this is who I AM!

THE CROW rips open his shirt once more to reveal his mechanical heart and stares menacingly, seriously at RED, who is shocked and dismayed.

With considerable effort, LANCE pulls himself up to seize the moment. He is struggling, though. LANCE and THE CROW cross swords again. THE CROW nicks LANCE now on the right arm. The CROW is winning.

The GOVERNOR strides in, stage right, stops, looks to the bar, seeing a huge, encyclopedia-size book with the title "Bar Codes & Rules" in large print on the spine and front, though it's center has been carved out and fitted to hold three bottles. He takes one bottle out at a time, the smallest first, then the medium-sized one and finally the largest, inspects each, considering it for a weapon, but shrugs them all off one by one as LANCE and THE CROW fight, seizes the hefty book as a weapon, rushes over behind LANCE to strike him down again and raises it over LANCE's head. THE CROW's guard, standing slightly downstage of him, pulls her riot helmet off to reveal that she is DERRIERE.

DERRIERE
Brother, NO!

THE GOVERNOR
(freezing, in shock to
see his sister)
Sister?

DERRIERE
Yes!

The GOVERNOR brings the heavy book back down and drops it to the floor. He and DERRIERE both in unison do the same odd hand gesture of opening palms up to each other. They sigh. DERRIERE runs to him, hugs him and guides him to a table upstage, stage left. HEADLEY appears at the door, sees the two and joins them. Soft spot on them as the GOVERNOR is seen to relax with a smile on his face. DERRIERE and HEADLEY help him put his feet up and his shoes are taken off. HEADLEY takes them and reaches inside for the flash keys, nods to DERRIERE as the GOVERNOR falls asleep finally. Spot out on them, back up on the scene at the bar between LANCE and THE CROW.

LANCE is faltering badly. LULU puts the rose under LANCE's nose and he rouses, pulls himself up again with great effort, but with renewed strength and drives his sword straight through THE CROW's heart. THE CROW falls limp, then draws himself up again, this time with an evil smile on his face. He pulls LANCE's foil out of his chest, by its blade and hands it back to LANCE. A loud ticking of the clock is heard with an ominous echo now. Then an eerie, mechanical voice, first in a high pitch like a child's, lowering in pitch as the numbers descend, counting, until the voice sounds thunderous, deep and monstrous "seven, six, five.."

THE CROW
LANCE! The clock ticks. Follow your code and live!

The voice continues, lower still, "four..."

LANCE
(spins dramatically to face LULU again, sword drawn back almost as if to attack her. Hesitates)
YES!

Intake of breath from RED, HEADLEY, DERRIERE and all three dancers. The clock ticks audibly and the ominous, deep voice continues, "three, two-"

LULU
(desperate and unsure)
LANCE! Surprise me!

LANCE throws down his sword, with a clang, swoops in with a single step toward LULU, slips his arm around her, pulls her toward him and kisses her, passionately. The hands on the clock above swing wildly and stop to point to eleven o'clock. The strange, otherworldly voice resounds, "One".

The room goes dark and then flashes as if lightning has silently struck. Then darkness again.

LULU
(still breathless in LANCE's arms)
Where ever did you learn to do that?

LANCE
Not from any book. Not from any movie. Not from any video game.

The lights come up. LULU still in LANCE's arms, looks at him lovingly, smiles and sighs.

LANCE
I'm a quick study.

LULU
(breathlessly, still in his arms)
And...And you're alright! You're still alive, at the eleventh hour!How is that possible?

LANCE
You made it possible for me, LULU. You showed me. It's your connection. OUR connection. The antidote was in your kiss.

LULU
But how did you know?

THE CROW reaches over to the other silver briefcase that his guard (DERRIERE), had left on the floor.

THE CROW
Congratulations, LANCE. You've broken the rules of the great game! Ruined my perfect program, the code of Kings! Played the piece that refuses to move in a straight line, an option unavailable in any of my games. You went AROUND and THROUGH!

LULU
The "L" move!

COCO, SUAVE & SUNNY
(gathering themselves together in a swooning barbershop quartet-like cluster)
Love!

THE CROW

Not in MY game. The one thing that could never be mine. Love! Now I shall take, what IS mine!

THE CROW throws the briefcase onto the bar, jumps over the bar and positions himself with a flourish to open it toward himself. He unlatches the briefcase with a loud click heard in the sudden silence, as everyone looks on frozen in suspense.

THE CROW
This is what I've been waiting for my whole life!

The CROW begins to lift the lid of the briefcase. An eerie whirring sound is heard emanating from inside of it. Red runs toward THE CROW, in a panic to protect him, to try to save him, crying out:

RED
No, my Love!

RED manages only to get between THE CROW and the silver briefcase, and throws her arms around him in desperation. He seems only in shock at this unexpected gesture by her and his arms are extended out as she clings to him with her head buried in his neck. There is a deep, resonant, explosive, echoing sound, a flash of light, a spot on what looks to be a flame on stage, then dying embers and a white mechanical dove appears, fluttering above the flames, ascending until it disappears. In the dim light everyone onstage is seen taking cover or huddled together in fear. Nothing remains of THE CROW and RED, but smoke. A rich baritone voice:

NARRATOR
We are awakened, inspired, shaped and fashioned by what we love in this world. Careful what you love...

A NEW DAY/CURTAIN CALL

The band plays an overture of the songs from the show. Lights come up at "The Font" to show LANCE and LULU are now running things behind the bar. Bows are taken and THE CROW and RED are seen taking their bows from the screens above in sepia-tone videos. Then they run out from backstage to join the rest of the cast.

THE END